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OLD PLANTATION DAYS



"HIS BEARING WAS SUPERB"—Page 51

OLD PLANTATION DAYS

BY

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Author of "Under the Pines," "The Banners of the Coast,"

"Tom and I on the Old Plantation,"

"Plantation Game Trails," etc.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS



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TO
WILLIAM MANN IRVINE

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

*He is not like another one
Of all my friends. He stands alone.
Beyond the field and bounding wood,
Far on the seashore's solitude,
A Tree behind a rugged Rock
Has long withstood the breaker's shock.
The Rock is bold and clean and hard;
Its face by tempests old is scarred.
It changes not in sun or rain,
In calm, or raging hurricane.
It has an aspect nobly grand,
Interpreting for sea and land
The grandeur of the gales that break.
But cannot once this Titan shake.
It has a beauty fine and grave,
A beauty wrought by wind and wave.
Sometimes in maelstroms it is drowned;
Sometimes by wild foam-flowers crowned
As if the mad Gale understood
The Rock's calm-couraged hardihood,
And gave, the harrying waves among,
A tribute to a champion strong. . . .
No storm this outpost has escaped;
Its strength by hardship has been shaped;
By it, in nights of fear and gloom,
The Terrible was overcome.
It won in conflict, not in ease,
Its power of tremendous peace.
Such shelter as it gives the Tree,
My steadfast friend has given me.*

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OLD PLANTATION DAYS

I

JUDGE NAPIER'S SENTENCE

IT was only after a desperate struggle that Julian Broderick, a state policeman, had mastered the fugitive. Broderick could not remember having ever had so stern and prolonged a chase and so sudden and fierce an encounter. The affair happened, too, on a peculiarly lonely stretch of beach between the solitary pinelands and the waste sea marshes. Broderick knew that had the struggle ended differently many a day would have passed before his friends learned of his fate—if they ever learned of it. After the posse had abandoned the pursuit, Broderick had dogged his man through swamps and across rivers until at last he had come upon him just as the fellow was about to cross a deep tidal estuary. In the clash that followed the law had triumphed,

and as soon as Broderick had handcuffed his man the two began the toilsome march to Sellers, the nearest settlement.

The prisoner was Jason Jones, a powerful negro, whose reputation in his community at Rosemary up to the time when he robbed Ashton, the storekeeper, had been good. Jones had fled on the night of the crime. The deed had been done on a Friday. It was not until the following Tuesday that the robber was caught; in all that time, Broderick felt sure, the silent man who now marched before him had had hardly a mouthful to eat. Compared with Broderick, Jason Jones was a giant; and the state policeman felt that he should have had small chance against so formidable an antagonist if the man had not been exhausted by the pitiless and protracted pursuit. Broderick was sorry for the fellow, and he intended when they reached Sellers to see to it immediately that the man was decently cared for.

The two men arrived in the seacoast village at sunset, but a strange sort of darkness had already set in. A sharp misty rain, driven by an insistent east wind, had been falling for an hour. The huddled houses of the small settlement showed lights in them. It was an evening to be indoors. Broderick, weary phys-

ically and mentally, at last brought his captive to the post office. Sellers was the kind of village that has only one officer of the law, who serves as constable, storekeeper and postmaster, and Broderick was an old friend of this man, whose name was Jim Laws.

"Jim," he said, "I've got a man here with me. Guess I'll have to ask you to let me keep him here to-night."

"Right, Julian," the other answered, gazing with interest on the powerful form of Jason Jones. "Tell me what you need, Julian."

"I must take this man on the truck to the city the first thing in the morning. We've had nothing to eat, Jim, for a good while."

The postmaster busied himself behind the counter; and soon cheese, crackers, canned salmon and ancient gingerbreads were forthcoming. These he set before Broderick.

"Jason," said his captor, not without kindness, "I'll take the cuffs off now for a while so that you can eat your supper." The negro muttered thanks.

The postmaster, who had been about to close up shop when the two men arrived, slouched into his overcoat.

"Stormy wind coming up," he remarked; "if it doesn't get too bad, Julian, I'll have my wife

send you up a pot of hot coffee. I'll tell Dave Janney about stopping for you in the morning." In a lower voice he added, "Come to the door." And when Broderick had complied, the postmaster whispered, "Julian, do you want any help with this fellow to-night? I can come back if you think you might need me."

"No, I can manage him," Broderick replied. "There's no reason for you to come back."

The door, which the storekeeper now opened, was blown violently against the wall. The two smoky lamps in the room flared convulsively. Broderick shot an apprehensive glance toward his prisoner.

"Regular storm," he said by way of farewell to the postmaster, who stepped forth into the rain and the night.

To be left alone for a night with a prisoner was no new experience for Broderick; he took the situation as a matter of course.

"Jason," he said, raising his voice somewhat in order to make himself heard above the wind, "there's a bench over there, where you can get some sleep. I'll put the cuffs back on you, that being according to orders and regulations."

The negro made no protest. In his silent way he seemed to be sensible of the kindness

that Broderick had shown him. When the handcuffs had been adjusted, the fellow went obediently to the rude couch and lay down. There was something resigned about his manner, as if he had realized that there was no use trying to escape the hand of the law.

Jason soon slept, though the night was no night for sleeping. In a chair tilted against the counter sat Broderick, trying to read by the dim lamplight a week-old paper. Outside the wind had slowly increased until now it was almost a cyclone. The watcher was sure that he heard a great tree go down. The frame building began to creak and groan.

"No chance for Jim to send that coffee," he kept saying to himself. As the hours wore on toward midnight, the violence of the gale increased. Jim Laws' store was especially exposed to the force of the blast. The storm was coming from the east. There was nothing in the village of Sellers between the sea marshes and the post office. A small lumber yard was to the north. The few scattered dwellings were a considerable distance away on the landward side. The post office had to take the full fury of the tempest.

About an hour before midnight Broderick, now thoroughly alarmed, went to the window

on the leeward side of the building. In the darkness a storm-lashed tide was raging before a seventy-mile gale. The salt water was already under the building. Knowing the ways of coastal storms, Broderick realized that this was a hurricane out of the West Indies. At any moment the rising tide might sweep from its foundations the rickety structure in which he and his prisoner were sheltered. Crossing the room to the windward side, he saw that water was already on the floor, and that salt spume was driving in through the cracks in the building.

Broderick hurriedly set three mail sacks and certain boxes of store goods on the counter. He would try to keep what he could out of the wet for Jim Laws. There was no chance that the postmaster would get back, for he and his neighbors, too, would be fully occupied in getting their families out of their endangered houses to places of safety. Broderick and his prisoner would have to shift for themselves.

With Jason, exhaustion had had its way; he was sleeping through the storm. His huge form lay cramped on the small couch. Broderick was glad that the man should rest, but the time had come to awaken him. His decision to arouse him was hastened by a grinding

crash, which was followed by a heavy down-pour through the roof. A live-oak tree had fallen on the building.

"When live oaks go," Broderick muttered, "it's time for us to leave!"

Even after the fall of the tree through the roof the negro slept; Broderick had some difficulty in awakening him.

"Jason, sit up and listen to what I have to say."

Broderick waited until he was sure that his prisoner had full possession of his senses.

"Jason, we are caught in a storm—you understand? You and I have to leave this place. Now, I want to give you the best chance I can to get away. I am therefore going to take the cuffs off. You are to stay with me as long as you can, Jason. If things get so bad that you have to save yourself from drowning, look out for yourself. But when the storm is over, you are to come back to me. Is it a fair deal and agreement?"

"Yes, cap'n, more than fair," the towering black man replied, evidently impressed by Broderick's quiet manner, which was in high contrast to the howling gale.

At that moment there came a heavy thudding against the windward side of the build-

ing, then a smashing, splintering blow. A heavy stick of pine timber, drifting from the sawmill near by, had been driven like a ram through the side of the building. The waves drove it farther in, and twisted it, so that now through the gaping hole the sea water rushed. The spumy salt tide rushed also through the door that Broderick opened. On the threshold the two men stood for a moment. The white man was afraid that the negro might not be willing to venture forth. He turned to call to Jason, and at the same time took a step downward into the wild tide-race.

"Take my hand, Jason; let's try to get through this together."

Even while he was speaking, he was thrown violently against the building, and the hand that had reached out for Jason's was clutching the air. With a groan, Broderick sank into the seething black waters. A heavy timber, companion to the one that had rammed the building, had been driven against him. His leg was broken near the thigh; he could neither swim nor stand; he would surely drown.

Into the wailing darkness came the huge form of Jason. His bulk loomed monstrous in the doorway.

"Cap'n, where is you?" he shouted.



"BRODERICK CALLED BACK FAINTLY, 'HERE, JASON! BUT I'M
DONE FOR. SAVE YOURSELF' "—*Page 9*

With his feeble fingers trailing idly against the side of the building, with his breath almost gone from another savage thrust of the cruel timber, Broderick called back faintly, "Here, Jason! But I'm done for. Save yourself. Keep the wind at your back, and you'll get into the woods. Save yourself."

In the oblivion that surged down upon him, the doomed man in the water was hardly aware of the giant form that towered above him in the storm. But great arms were under him, lifting him. A voice of hope spoke to him. A strength to master the strength of the storm had come to shield him.

It was noon of the following day; and though the wind was still high, the clouds were breaking. What had been the village of Sellers was now a desolation. Three miles inland, in a pinelander's stout cabin, lay Broderick. Jason had brought him there through the storm, and the first object the aching eyes of the state policeman caught as he opened them was the huge form of the negro, seated near the fireplace.

"You've come back, Jason," said Broderick, "as you promised. You are a man of your word."

"I didn't never gone, cap'n," the negro responded simply.

Then the owner of the cabin told of the exploit of Jason. In ending he said with some show of feeling, "He carried you just like a woman would a baby, Julian; and he would not rest till he had you as comfortable as you could be made. He must be a mighty faithful man of yours."

"He is," said Julian Broderick.

That was a strange trial which, two weeks later, was called in the courtroom of Judge Trevelyan Napier in Charleston. Jason Jones, accused of robbing the Ashton store in Rosemary, was at the bar of justice. The judge had heard the evidence; and in his charge to the jury he had suggested that, if the twelve gentlemen found a verdict of guilty, he would see to it that the punishment met the offense. He intimated that the robbing of country stores was a practice that, so far as he could effect it, would have to cease in Charleston County.

"Jason Jones," said Judge Napier, addressing the prisoner, "the law gives you the right to make any statement you may wish to make; do you wish to say anything for yourself?"

"Please, sah," the negro replied, "make my

fine as light as you can. I'se mighty sorry I done broke in the store. My wife is dead, and I has seven head of chillun. I broke in the store 'caze they been hongry."

At that moment there was a stir in the courtroom. Broderick, lying on a cot, was brought in. The doctors at the hospital had not yet permitted him even to use crutches. From his bed of pain he told with evident effort the story of the storm. Through it all the listeners were spellbound. Judge Napier cleared his throat suspiciously.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said at the conclusion of the policeman's story, "retire for your verdict. Find according to the evidence."

In a few minutes the men returned with the verdict of guilty.

"Jason Jones, stand up and hear your sentence," said Judge Napier. "We find you guilty of robbing the Ashton store. But we also find you guilty of saving your captor's life at the great risk of your own, and you stayed by him as you had promised to do. The amount of damage that you did the store is about five dollars, which I, in an unofficial capacity, will make good. The account of the law against you is cleared by your late conduct. Jason, you are a free man. May you be a good

one. Return home now and work hard for those seven children. Mr. Broderick, here, and certain other gentlemen in the room have thrown together and now hand you this little gift of a hundred dollars. Jason, I am convinced that you are naturally a brave and good man. Be brave and good always. You may go. You are free."

II

WHAT SCARED KITTY

THE very first intimation Maj. Meriwether Bohun had that anything was wrong was the tremendous bound that his mare, Kitty, gave. Had he not been an expert horseman, the little thoroughbred's sudden dash would surely have unseated him; but he managed to keep his saddle and to pull in the mare.

"Whoa, girl!" he said gently, gathering in the lines with his left hand and patting his mount soothingly with his right. "What is it that scared you, little one? There's nothing on this old swamp road to frighten any one, Kitty."

But there evidently was; for the mare was trembling and blowing her breath spasmodically through her wide, quivering nostrils. Maj. Bohun knew from those signs that Kitty's keen senses had detected some danger on that narrow, dark, lonely pathway.

It happened on the old road leading from Maj. Bohun's plantation in the Santee country

to the neighboring plantation of Wedgewood, which, except for a few negro tenants, had long since been deserted. Moreover, it happened at night. The major was sure that his mare had scented danger of some kind. Her nervousness was increasing every moment; she kept fidgeting, and then began to give unmistakable signs of intending to bolt.

"One of the girth buckles may be jamming her," the major said to himself. "I'll get off a minute to feel if everything is all right."

He dismounted and led the frightened mare forward a few paces; then he stopped her and his hands began to fumble over the buckles of the girth. For the moment, he let the lines fall loose on the horse's neck. In that moment, whether the mare realized that her master was off his guard or whether some stray wind had wafted to her another scent of her peril, she whirled suddenly and, snorting loudly, galloped back down the black passage of the road along which she had come.

There the major was left standing, three miles from home and three miles from Wedgewood. He was on an elevated part of the road, on what had once been a causeway; and that particular point was near the heart of the swamp that separated his own plantation from

Wedgewood. Yet, strange as it may seem, Maj. Bohun's presence in such a place at such a time had come about in a perfectly natural way.

That afternoon he had promised to go over to Wedgewood to see a sick negro. The day had been hot; a thunderstorm had come up just as the major was about to start on his ride, and for more than an hour a wild tempest had shaken the tall magnolias and swayed the great live oaks that stood round the major's house. The sun was setting when at last the rain ceased.

With the major a promise was a promise. He had sent word to the negro that he was coming, and nothing would have kept him from fulfilling his obligation. The major was a proud man; yet his pride was productive of the highest virtues—generosity, courage, hospitality, and gallant adherence to a fine code of honor. There was no man of his county who had suffered more or who complained less, who had had more cause for tears yet who had preserved more genuinely his light heart, his merry smile, and his ringing laughter.

Behind his rambling old plantation house, many parts of which had acknowledged the triumph of time to the extent of leaning de-

jectedly, stood a little brick building. It had been a smoke-house, but the major had fitted it with benches and a fireplace. There the many negroes who came to see him could have a warm and sheltered waiting place. From there, as soon as the storm had abated, Major Bohun had called Will, his ancient negro servant. At the foot of the steps Will had stood, with his battered cap in his hand, and with the last fine drops of the heavy shower falling upon his gray head.

"Will," the major had said, "I want you to saddle Kitty for me. It's stopped raining, and I'm going over to Wedgewood to see poor Joe Wilson."

Maj. Bohun made his tone final. He knew very well that Will would be sure to object to his plan. Long, faithful service had given the negro the privilege of advising his master on all matters.

"You gwine there to-night, Mas' Meriwether?" he had asked, with strong disapproval in his tone. "Dat road is so bery slippery after dis rain, sah, and Wedgewood is a long, lonely way off, sah."

Although the objection was dutifully made, the negro would really have been disappointed if the major had not kept to his word. It

would have been the first time it had ever happened; and the dusky servitor was not at all beneath appreciating a delicate point of honor, and of considering it as his own as well as his master's.

"No; I must go, Will," the major had answered at once. "I shall be ready as soon as you get the horse here."

Down at the stable, while Will was adjusting the bridle and saddle on Kitty, he kept muttering proudly to himself, "Cose he gwine! I done know he wouldn't bruk his wud! No, sah, not eben to a sick nigger! Bruk his wud?" he asked himself with scornful incredulity, to afford himself the satisfaction of stoutly denying such an absurdity. "Not him! Dat's about all we got left on dis ole place now; but we ain't gwine to lose dat! No, sah, not so long as me and Mas' Meriwether libes. You hear dat, Kitty?"

Meanwhile Maj. Bohun had been taking stock of what he could spare for the sick man at Wedgewood. The bundle that he finally tied up consisted of sundry little packages of groceries, the waistcoat of an old suit of evening clothes, a flaming red tie of antique design and a woolen muffler. It was an odd assortment of gifts for an invalid; but the major

did not trouble himself about that. The gifts would carry his affection; and that was the most that any gift could carry.

It was an hour later, when he was riding along the lonely swamp road, that something had frightened Kitty.

After his mount had galloped off in the darkness, Maj. Bohun stood doubtfully in the black gulch of the road. The package for the sick man he had stuffed into one of his greatcoat pockets, and he now put his hand on it reminiscently.

There was everything to take him back home, it seemed: this danger, whatever it was, should take him back; the fact that he was now on foot should make him turn rather than go on; it would take him more than an hour to walk to the negro cabin at Wedgewood, and he well knew how uncomfortable he would be when he arrived. But in spite of all that Maj. Bohun did not hesitate. His mind had made him pause, but his heart had had only a single purpose. He would go on.

All the dark and lonely way to Wedgewood the major puzzled over Kitty's fright. There were several things that might have caused it. Out of the lonely vastness of the monstrous swamp might have come a roaming black bear;

it might have been a negro fugitive from one of the county chain gangs; it might have been a rattlesnake, the sinister and penetrating odor of which will make even the best horse unmanageable.

Before the major started forward he had listened intently for a sound that might betray the identity of the creature that had frightened his mare; but except for the lonely wind grieving through the towering pines the silence of the moldering swamp was unbroken.

Once, indeed, he heard the far-off and melancholy note of a great horned owl; but it was so weird and remote that it seemed a tone of the deep woodland wilderness itself rather than the voice of a living creature.

"I don't know what it could have been; I give up," Maj. Bohun muttered to himself; "but it certainly gave Kitty a bad scare. She'll go into the stable lot at home. I hope Will doesn't find her to-night; he would worry a good deal about me."

An hour's walk through the silent, cavernous woods brought the major to the borders of Wedgewood, and soon afterwards he came to Joe Wilson's cabin.

Matters were worse than Maj. Bohun had anticipated, and he was heartily glad that he

had come. From the dim couch beside the dark fireplace where he lay, the sick negro looked up at him with grateful eyes.

"I knowed you would come, sah," he said, rousing himself to make the effort of speaking. He tried to sit up in the light of the smoking lamp, but he had not the strength.

The major busied himself to make Joe comfortable. The invalid was alone in the cabin, and was too weak to help himself; but Maj. Bohun knew what to do. First he conferred his gifts, and that lightened the negro's heart. Next he made the fire blaze brightly. He then unwrapped the groceries he had brought, and used the paper to stuff up a drafty crack above the negro's bed; then he put on a few old pans and began to cook some of the food. And all the while he kept talking cheerfully to the stricken man, whose only reply was a reiteration of the solemn statement:

"I sholy would 'a' died dis night, Mas' Meriwether, if you hadn't 'a' come."

When the sick man had had his supper, the major began to prepare to return; but there was such a dumb appeal in the negro's eyes that he speedily came to a different decision.

"Joe," he said, "I believe I'll just stay here for the night. Kitty got away from me, and I

don't want to walk all the way home in the dark. I'll just sit in this chair by the fire. You go to sleep now, Joe, and I'll be right here when you wake."

The negro could not thank him, but he sighed with deep content and closed his eyes peacefully. The depth of his gratitude became articulate in his dreams; for once he cried out poignantly, as if in protest, "No! No! He done say he would come!" and then subsided into deep slumber.

When morning came, Maj. Bohun was still sitting beside Joe; and when the negro woke, refreshed and much better, he saw the old planter's kindly face.

Joe's fever was gone, and his brain, he said, was clear.

"You had a good night, Joe," said the major. "You are going to get well now. I'll send Will over with some things for you this afternoon; and to-morrow I'll come again myself."

Into the radiant dawn of a golden September day the major stepped; and as he walked briskly down the plantation road, he squared his shoulders and hummed blithely an old love melody. He loved the woods; and this walk home through the dewy freshness and glim-

mering beauty filled him with pure joy. On all sides the marvelous beauty of the Southern forest withdrew into rare beauty; the vistas, in ending, suggested a diviner loveliness beyond them.

It was, indeed, so beautiful that Maj. Bohun did not think of the sinister experience of the night before until he came almost to the place where Kitty had deserted him. Then he remembered; and he was not at all surprised to see the faithful Will coming down the narrow causeway to meet him.

"He's found Kitty with the saddle and bridle on her," said the major to himself, "and has come over to see what has happened to me."

But suddenly Will stopped abruptly in the road; then he gave a shout and jumped back. Maj. Bohun came up quickly; Will was calling to him to be careful, and was pointing to what lay on the causeway.

Spanning the road between him and the negro, Maj. Bohun saw the thing that had frightened Kitty. It was a monstrous reptile—a diamond-backed rattler of the swamp. Its massive body could not have been less than nine feet long.

It lay at a peculiar, awkward angle; but its broad, malignant, spade-shaped head was



"IT WAS A MONSTROUS REPTILE—A DIAMOND-BACKED RATTLER OF THE SWAMP"—Page 22

alertly raised, and its cold, yellow eyes glittered ominously. About the grim and terrible mouth there was an expression of savage cruelty. The lips were pallid, drawn, deadly; but the huge rattlesnake seemed to have control of the forward part of its body only. It could strike, but it could not coil. Its back had evidently been injured. Yet, partly because of that very injury, it was the most dangerous and formidable monster of the lonely Southern swamp.

The negro made a detour through the bushes, and now stood beside Maj. Bohun, who told him of Kitty's breaking away.

"And there's what scared her," he added, as they gazed at the hideous rattler; "no wonder she bolted from me."

"But dat snake ain't been lyin' here all night?" the negro asked, staring, fascinated, at the dread reptile in the roadway before them.

"I believe I know what happened," the major replied. "Kitty shied when we passed the snake. She winded him, but she did not know where he was. Then, when she broke and galloped back, she ran over him and injured him. Yes, he has lain there all night. What a monster!"

It took the two men the better part of half an hour to cut long poles in the swamp and to kill the powerful rattlesnake. The major then counted the rattles; there were twenty-nine. He also saw where the mare's hoofs had crushed the back of the reptile.

"See here, Will," he said, pointing to the deep wound, "here's where Kitty scored. This snake must have been maddened by such trampling," he went on, half to himself, "and would have been wild to strike after such an injury. Now if I hadn't gone on to Wedgewood," he mused aloud; "if I had turned back. The road is so narrow here, and it was so dark—"

Maj. Bohun cleared his throat slightly. The negro, whose eyes were wet, said hurriedly and in a tone of assumed assurance, "But you didn't been in no danger, sah, 'cause you had done promised Joe to come to see him. And we don't neber bruk dat Bohun wud, sah."

III

THE AIM OF THE HUNTERMAN

THE negroes in the golden-wide ricefield, as they reaped rhythmically, were singing melodiously; their steady advance bowed before it the tall ripe grain; the mellow sunshine steeped the scene; there was the glamour of autumn and harvest-time in the air. It was cool for September in South Carolina, and there were hints of fall in the air; though that radiant, reddening, ripening time had as yet been stayed from the heavy-foliaged trees that fringed the ricefield. Toward Ned Alston, the planter, who was watching the happy workers with delight, there now advanced the smiling Scipio, the grandson of the old professional slave hunter of Eldorado; and, much to the pride of this unique character Alston always addressed him as "My Hunterman."

Scipio well deserved the title. No Cherokee Indian who ever ranged the pine forests and the cypress swamps of the South had understood them better than he. He possessed a certain untamed element in his nature which

served to ally him to all wild things and their ways. His occupation was never fixed, unless roaming can be considered an occupation; real work he disdained. But Scipio was full of picturesque accomplishments. He could pick the guitar, pray with much emotion at revival meetings, arbitrate differences among the negroes, and prescribe medicines in cases of sickness; and these remedies, being gathered from plantation woods and fields, could be recommended in that they were without money and without price. But by birth and breeding Scipio was a hunter. He alone could, after night, make a direct road home out of the most desolate and trackless swamp; he alone knew where the wariest old buck of the branches would lie, and at just what point in the vast level pinewoods a running deer could be cut off. In all such matters, Alston had been accustomed to defer to him. The planter had to confess, however, that Scipio was hardly to be accounted an economic asset of Eldorado plantation; but he certainly made for sentiment and romance, and was as fine a figure of the black man as the Santee country had produced.

Tall and sparse, he had the power of endurance written in the movements of his limbs and in his easy attitudes of repose. All his actions

appeared to be without effort, and he did things without appearing to strive. In feature, he was more like an Indian than a negro. His eyes were deep-set and keen, with a masked glitter of forest-wildness in them. The expression of his face was quiet but indescribably wary, while the gleam of his ready smile almost constantly lighted his cheerful countenance.

And now, as Scipio approached Alston, who stood under a gnarled live-oak on the ricefield-bank, the planter eyed the negro's musket with mock disapproval.

"Well, Hunterman," he said, "and what are you loaded for this summer day?"

"Cap'n," the negro returned, "I come from Laurel Hill swamp. Two big bear done take up there, but I couldn't find them to-day. I hab a ball-bullet in my musket, sah," he went on, stroking the long barrel of his formidable weapon.

The eye of the planter rested with amusement yet with admiration on Scipio's gun.

This musket was of an age unknown and of a fashion long forgotten. Short in the stock but marvelously long in the barrel, it was throughout so pitted with rust-spots and powder-scalds that it frequently, when fired, emitted

spurts of angry flame. The misshapen hammer looked ancestral, almost prehistoric, while the nipple was nothing but a worn stub. But in the hands of the redoubtable Hunterman, and charged with the double load which he was accustomed to using, it was a deadly weapon. The sound it made was unlike that produced by any other kind of gun. Scipio's musket blared, and it did so alarmingly. This fearsome roar was known to all dwellers in the Santee country, and what it meant filled every one who heard it with deep pride in Scipio's daring and prowess. On stormy twilights, when the wild-ducks would be pouring into the old ricefields, a sound like the crack of doom would crash the stillness of the plantation regions, and would reverberate for miles up and down the misty river. Then the negroes, hugging their cabin fires, would say, "Eh, brudder, what chance is a duck got 'gainst a noise like dat?" Again, when the roar of the musket would come from the pine woods, there would always be some negroes who would hear it and would remark, "Deer can jump and run, but he can't jump powder and he can't outrun shot,—not when brudder Scipio opens fire on him."

So now, when Scipio laid this extraordinary weapon down on the dewberry vines that had

matted themselves on the slope of the ricefield bank, Alston eyed it with affectionate fun.

"Time you were getting a new gun, Hunterman," he said; "some day she's going to blow up and scatter you over a ten-acre field."

But Ned Alston's admiration for Scipio's skill as a woodsman now suffered a certain eclipse and depreciation, as, looking across the brown stiff stubble, over which the heat-waves shimmered and swam, he saw the Hunterman's wife toiling faithfully with the men and with the stronger women, though her own child was but a few weeks old. Yet it was hard to get angry with the picturesque Scipio; one might blame a domestic nature for such neglect, but not a nature which was essentially wild, restless, untamed. Yet the planter could not help saying:

"Scipio, you know this is no season for you to hunt bear. Why aren't you in that field reaping rice? You know Amy ought not work as she is working yonder, while her baby is so young. She had to bring him down here with her to-day; he's down the bank there, under the wahwoo bush. Amy ought to be at home with the child, and you ought to be in the field."

But the Hunterman ignored the planter's cogent reasoning.

"I done seen him yonder," he smilingly said,

the light of a deep, shy, wild, woodland affection for his one baby coming into his eyes; "he done been asleep," he added softly, and still smiling, as if such a performance on the part of his baby was both wonderful and amusing.

The disagreeable subject of work was not again referred to; for Scipio, taking advantage of its temporary diversion, straightway began to tell Alston of a family of black fox-squirrels near the northern bound of the plantation that had been marked for the winter's pastime of the planter. The talk continued to be of things woodland until Alston moved out from under the little oak, thinking he would step down the bank to see what progress the harvesting would show from a different angle. Like every planter, the world over, when he emerged from the shelter which had cut off his view of the sky, with its tokens of fair or stormy weather, he glanced upward. Scipio, equally solicitous about such matters, but from far different reasons, also looked up. Both men saw at a glance the same dread apparition.

With wide and powerful wings outspread in the heavens, in one of those last lowering circles ere he should fall, a great bald eagle was wheeling. Unconscious of the presence of the

two men standing beneath the oak, he had been circling above them, they knew not for how long. And the moment they discerned him, certain at last of his reconnaissance and of the exact position of his prey, he eagerly arched his mighty wings and volplaned roaring out of the sky. His snowy head, with its cruel beak partly open in the heat of the hunt, was slightly outstretched. His stocky legs were letting down their talons to grip their prey. The fall of the eagle was terrible, a fearfully beautiful spectacle; impressive, but most sinister in its splendor.

Alston cried, "What an eagle, Scipio!"

But the dusky Hunterman, like lightning to think when wild life was in sight, had instantly discerned the goal of the great harrier's fall. He marked the tragedy in an instant.

"My lil' baby," he cried brokenly;—"dat big eagle's gwine to get him!"

The negroes in the ricefield, who were working at a distance of some acres from the bank, were unaware of the impending disaster. They were reaping happily, laughing and singing. Even if they had seen and had realized what was taking place, they were far too distant to help. The eagle might have heard their shouts, but he would not have released his prey.

Always bold, the bald eagle is amazingly so when a coveted victim, almost within his clutches, seems about to be taken from him. In the waving field, the little child's mother was singing with the rest, swinging the flashing sickle rhythmically and laying the golden reaped grain in rich windrows on the brown stubble.

At first, only the planter and Scipio were aware of the terrible scene now being enacted before their very eyes. If the child was to be saved, they alone must do it. Yet what hope had they of succeeding?

The plumed wahwoo bush beside which Amy had laid her child was more than a hundred yards from them down the grass-grown, briar-matted bank. It would take the men fifteen seconds to reach the place; and by then the eagle, bearing his prey, might be far beyond the cypresses on the river-bank, or even beating his powerful way over the broad river itself. It was a desperate moment.

From his great height in the sky, the eagle had detected a movement of life near the bank; and the colorless cloth in which the baby was wrapped had not given him reason for any suspicions. He saw prey before him, far from the workers in the wide field.

He wheeled lower, gaging the distance and

marking his victim with the piercing sight of fierce clairvoyant eyes. Whether it was a fawn or the young of some other animal, he knew not; it mattered not to the great bird of prey. The little creature was alive and defenseless; therefore he would fall upon it. With his curved talons wide, he dropped like a black thunderbolt out of the blue sky. The wind roared through the hollow arches of his wings. His talons ached for the fatal grip. His steady eyes were aflame with cruel hunger and the anticipation of its instant satisfaction.

The moment that Ned Alston realized the terrible import of Scipio's words, he sprang forward with a shout, and would have raced down the bank, almost beside himself as he was with pity and horror. But the Hunterman, with a touch on his arm, stayed him.

"If you shout, Cap'n, he will fly faster," said Scipio. "We couldn't get him now no how. But wait a minute, please, suh."

The huge eagle, whose fall had been completed, and which had for a moment been buried in the grass beside the bush, now rose heavily above the bank. Gripped in his talons and held close to his great body was Scipio's baby.

But the Hunterman was going to have something to say in the matter. He was kneeling

on the bank, his old musket at his shoulder.

"Scipio!" the planter cried out poignantly, "what are you going to do?"

"I'se gwine to shot him," the negro returned, in tones that betrayed not a tremor.

Alston suppressed a wild desire to protest against what he felt sure would be a peril as grave to the child as the eagle's attack. But instinct told him it was better not to speak. The Hunterman was taking aim. The shot would be most difficult as well as dangerous. It was at a small moving target, and the negro had told Alston that his musket was loaded with one ball—"a ball bullet," meant for bear in the Laurel Hill swamp.

In the fleeting second while the planter crouched breathless beside the kneeling negro, he caught the expression on Scipio's face. It was tense but not nervous, and flint-like in its determination. The eyes gleamed steadily. There was not a quiver in the statuesque black figure, immovable as marble.

The workers in the ricefield had heard Alston's first shout, and the nature of the tragedy was borne in on them by one of their number, who, being a hunter, cried out the danger. The big eagle caught their gaze at once. Now they could see the child, wrapped in the drab

cloth, struggling feebly. They could not hear the pitiful little cry that came to the ears of Alston and Scipio. Amy, the mother, had begun to run wildly across the stubble, waving her arms, shouting, and weeping impotently. But the great eagle had nothing to fear from those far-away pursuers.

Then on the air the musket of Scipio blared. The giant marauding bird collapsed in his skyward flight and fell heavily in the marsh on the edge of the field. The aim of the Hunterman, even in such a crisis, had been true; and the ball-bullet of the Hunterman had gone home.

In a few moments, Amy had her child in her arms. And then something happened which pleased the planter even more than the wonderful shot Scipio had just made. "Give me yo' sickle, Amy," he said; "as long as we'se got a lil' baby, I will never let you wuk no mo'."

That eagle, the largest ever taken in the Santee country, now stuffed and mounted, is one of Ned Alston's treasured trophies. Though he cannot look at it without something akin to a shudder, yet it always vividly recalls one of the most thrilling moments of his life, when an innocent child was saved, without

scath, from a terrible death. When he and Scipio look at the eagle together, they understand each other with a perfect affection. And the planter is wont to say:—

“Scipio, to this day I don't know how you did it.”

And Scipio answers, as if the feat had been simple enough:—

“How, Cap'n, ain't I is yo' Hunterman?”

IV

MY COLONEL

HE lives on one of the great rice plantations that lie along the Santee River in the coast country of South Carolina. His home was the headquarters of the Swamp Fox, the dauntless Francis Marion. On his visit to the far South, after the Revolution, the first gentleman in America, Gen. George Washington, breakfasted there. It has been the home of one of the most famous of Colonial Governors, and a second home to two signers of the Declaration. The noble old house itself looks like history. It has that alien yet generous majesty that is indefinably associated with the traditions of refinement. And because of this same spirit, which is in perfect harmony with the temper of its master, its hospitable doors are open wide to all comers. The old stage coach road from Charleston to Georgetown runs through the plantation; and even of late years, when travel on that route has been infrequent, my Colonel's old home has given welcome and shelter to

half a score of belated travelers at one time. It has been known to have gathered under its kindly roof during a single evening such a list as this: a horse doctor, a wandering spiritualist, a bishop, a whiskey drummer, a Presbyterian minister of the old school, an insurance agent, and a bibulous hunter. (No sequence is followed in this list save that which its very incongruity suggests.) And all of these my Colonel delights to entertain.

That he is six feet tall; that one shoulder droops because of two wounds, one from Malvern Hill and one from Gettysburg; that his head is regal in its carriage, with its thin aquiline nose, its eyes the color of the blue morning sky, its strong and tender mouth, half hidden under the heavy white mustache; that the cast of his countenance is noble and proud—all these are in a way descriptive; but it is by suggestion that you come to know the real character of the man.

Every negro in the county knows and loves my Colonel. In his dealings with them he is not as other men; he is unique and picturesque to a high degree. At 8 o'clock in the morning he will exhaust his nerves and his expletives on the old reprobate, Wash Green. (Once a

year, when he votes, he is known by his full name: George Washington Alexander Burn-sides Green.) He will stalk back and forth in a black rage, cursing the stupidity of the ragged negro who stands the fire well, and who keeps a cunning and humble silence. He will pause anon to pull a flower and to look over his beloved river and pine woods, while his eyes soften momentarily and his face is illumined by tender memories. But his reverie is as short as it is romantic. With double vehemence he descends on the lazy miscreant; then finally he will stride into the house, fumble in the harness-room over old buckles and broken chains, in the hall over tattered gloves and an outworn rifle, wondering the while, with growing contrition, whether he has not been too hard on poor Wash. At length he will be drawn—and it is chivalric to consider this appeal involuntary—to the great mahogany sideboard in the dining-room. Here he takes what he calls a precaution. (Sometimes he styles it a mild interjection.) This he accompanies with a silent toast: perchance to some visionary memory, perchance to some fair lost face out of the haunted past that lives in his heart. Then he will stretch himself in the huge arm-chair, where the Swamp Fox once dozed, and soon

will be deep in a cherished copy of Kipling—the only modern poet with whom he is familiar, although he used to be thoroughly versed in the works of Burns, Byron, and Tennyson. He reads Fuzzy Wuzzy, Gunga Din, and the Recessional. He knows this last by heart, and he cannot sit still under its powerful influence. So he walks out on the front piazza and down the steps, chanting the solemn and tremendous lines. There, under a big live oak, with its gray, sighing banners of moss, he comes abruptly upon Wash Green, who has been bidding his time. And now, indeed, the former things are passed away. For an hour they stand under the great oak and talk of the old times (being oblivious of the immediate and painful past). Then my Colonel, with a certain air of mystery about him, goes back into the house. Presently he reappears with his arm full of plunder. On closer inspection this would be seen to consist of a coat, two shirts, an old pair of leggins, and a plug of tobacco. His exit from the doorway is made somewhat surreptitiously, for more practical members of the family are apt to keep a hard eye on his generosity. But he reaches Wash in safety, and bestows his gifts with the old love in his eyes.

"W'ere iz I gwine see my Boss again?" queries Wash as he turns to go.

My Colonel's answer is a singular one; with the face of one reading the commination service he holds his right arm horizontal, with the thumb pointing dismally downward. Wash comprehends, and is convulsed; and as he crosses the field he breaks into shouts of laughter. Meanwhile, his master, humming happily the chorus of a love song, popular long before the War, returns to the dining-room and takes a double precaution.

As it is with Wash, so it is with all the negroes. My Colonel knows by name, character, parentage and proclivities every little pickaninny on the nearby plantations. And as a rule they make splendid pigmy workmen. One of my Colonel's right-hand men is Three Cents, who is only eight years old. His mother called him that the day he was born, "Caze," she said, with more justice than mercy, "he made such a po' showin'." Another one of his diminutive protégés is Monk. After this fashion he got his name: his mother, casting about vainly for something to call him, was at length persuaded to wait until some marked proclivity of her child should give her a clue as to an

appropriate appellation. When he was three years old he began to practise prehensile traits with his toes; he picked switches with them, and in climbing used them with remarkable skill; whereupon he was promptly christened Monk.

My Colonel is a lover of wild flowers; and the Santee woods are a paradise for them. On every hand in my Colonel's country Nature is riotous with her beauty and abundance. She is eager to retake what man has abandoned; and one by one the great plantations are falling to decay and desolation. Well she knows how to clothe a ruin, how to veil a cemetery, how to drape a tomb. And in this sweet silent land her flowers make lovely what were otherwise touched with the sadness of spiritual loneliness and pain. Yet, of these subconscious elements, my Colonel is hardly aware. He rides into the bay-branch and breaks a great fragrant cluster of snowy blooms for his wife; he reins in his horse to watch the humming birds at work and play; and he drenches his soul in the beauty of the pines, of the flowering thickets, and of the tender radiance of the blossoming fields. Of the flowers in the garden, he loves the red rose best; for half a century ago his

mother used to wear one in her hair. He even went so far in sentiment once as to write a little verse about a red rose; but he never showed it to any one, having always a deep regard for the sanctity of personal emotions.

My Colonel is the truest sportsman in the world. It is fifteen years since his youngest son, then but twelve years old, was so forgetful of his breeding one day as to shoot a quail on the ground. And to this hour his father cannot think of the incident without a profound feeling that the family has suffered shame and disgrace. One summer a neighboring rice planter shot a doe that had been destroying his pea field. Two days later a negro who worked in the turpentine woods found the fawn starving and brought it to my Colonel. The negro said that the old gentleman nearly cried when he saw the poor little creature; and he fed it himself with a bottle, covered it from the dew at night, and so saved its life. It finally grew into a three-prong buck that ate all the geraniums and kept the lawn shaggy; but my Colonel never regretted playing the Samaritan.

Touching matters of a religious nature, he is not self-conscious. He is reverent. He has nothing in common with those who say in their

hearts that there is no God; for he has passed through many waters, and has found Him in their depths. He always says his prayers, though on cold nights he is apt to cut them short. His favorite prayer is that of the Publican, and he often repeats it with comforting contrition.

With very little persuasion he will tell you about the War—and, of course, there is but one War to him. Though he bears two wounds, he is free from any taint of bitterness of self-pity. "To the brave men on both sides," he will say, lifting his glass for a toast, "to the brave men who fought and the braver women who waited." And to him Gettysburg will always be the greatest disaster in history.

But best of all you will love my Colonel because of his genuine heart. He will meet you in a dugout cypress canoe, ten miles from the plantation; and at midnight in a pouring rain will take you off the stranded tug-boat. Before long he will tell you of the time when, running his Kentucky mare at full speed, he killed the two giant bucks as they jumped the road. It is his way of crowning you with his love and confidence.

His eyes will fill when he tells you good-by. But as he stands waving to you from the deso-

late ricefield banks, you will catch the gleam of his eyes and the light of his smile. And you will remember him as a rare and true type of the Southern gentleman.

V

THE WHITEHORN BUCK

HE stood with his head above the gallberry-bushes, his antlers gleaming softly in the white winter sunlight. Near-by a wild sow, of gaunt frame and thin gray bristles that made a horror of her spine, was searching for her breakfast in the black rooty mud of the pine-barren swamp. In the tangled thicket of myrtle, water-brier and sweet-bay, birds were hopping about and singing. On all sides the great pine woods stretched away into a silence that held a deep rapture and a perfect peace. The sun, deliciously warm, filtered down through the fragrant pine-crests, shone on the tall brown broom-grass and the dewy swamp, and rested tenderly on the pale blue flowers that starred the sheltered places. The sun shone on the whitehorn buck, and he stood still, drinking in the comfort and beauty of the scene.

He carried the largest and handsomest horns of any deer in the Santee woods; their spread

was thirty inches, and there were six tines on each branch. His eyes, like those of all white-tail deer, were singularly full, wild and liquid. His deep chest was covered with a rough growth of shaggy black hair that seemed to increase the appearance of his size and strength. His legs tapered until it became marvelous how they could support his weight. His whole body was shapely, muscular, beautiful; and his bearing was that of a monarch.

Aside from his size, the one feature that would distinguish him from his fellows was the color of his antlers. They were almost pure white. And instead of giving him a freakish appearance, they seemed but in keeping with his carriage, and adorned his noble head.

The normal color of the horns of the Southern deer is a brownish amber, with a few white knobs here and there near the bases of the forks. Of the two varieties, the swamp- and the hill-deer, the swamp-buck's antlers are of a richer, darker brown, and their spread is more basket-shaped than those of his highland brothers.

Now the whitehorn buck was a swamp-deer, and just how he came to have antlers whiter than any hill-deer's will perhaps never be

known. But why they were white makes very little difference. The fact is that they were, and that he carried them. And for many years before this story begins he had become a living tradition on Santee, a breathing evidence of "the biggest old buck," the kind that always gets away.

For he was known to all the hunters on that section of the South Carolina coast. His horns were "yarned" about and coveted. And as with each succeeding year they increased in size and symmetry, the sportsmen, poachers and market hunters all longed with increasing desire to drop their gun-sights on him.

One February a negro turpentine hand picked up a branch of his antlers on the edge of the swamp and brought it to the Santee Club-house, where were gathered many hunters. Men who had killed moose in Maine, elk in Wyoming, and blacktail in the Dakotas, broke off in the midst of memorable yarns to gather in a circle, to handle the glorious antler, to admire it, and to resolve silently but vehemently to take back North as trophies the new and full set of horns when another season should have developed them.

But they had set their hearts on no ordinary game. They were no match for the white-

horn buck. They might surround a branch,—as a small swamp or thicket is called,—and put the best pack of hounds in the country on his trail; but the wary old buck would always slip out. When startled from his haunts among the bay-bushes, he had a habit of throwing his head back on his broad shoulders and racing down the drive, with the pack in full cry after him; but when he had drawn the hunters to that end of the swamp, he would double, and before he could be cut off, would be “stretching forward free and far” through the open woods. Then the only thing left for the chagrined hunters to do would be to stop the dogs and put them in other swamps after inferior deer.

Times past number the whitehorn buck eluded his pursuers. Nor was it because of his wildness. On the contrary, he was frequently seen. Negroes in the turpentine woods continually brought home stories of him.

One had seen him peacefully feeding on the edge of a bay thicket. One had seen him loping gracefully along under the pines. Again, his wide, deep track would be marked in the white sand of the road just outside the plantation gates. Up to the settlements he would roam in the night, browsing on the tender ferns

and grasses and rubbing himself in the scrub-oak and sparkleberry copses. Many times he had been shot at, and if stories were to be believed, he had received mortal wounds on numerous occasions. But no hunter ever had a hair or a drop of blood from the monarch that bore the gleaming antlers to substantiate his story or prove the fatality of his aim.

There were not a few sportsmen who would have gladly taken the trip from the North to Santee just to get a shot at the buck, but most of them realized that their desire was a vain thing. There were grizzled old hunters, natives of the deep swamp, who knew the lure and magic of the woods, who thought nothing of bringing home six wild turkeys and a black bear in a single day, desperate men, too, they were, who knew more than one use for the hunting-knife. But even they failed to get more than a sight or perhaps a hopeless shot at the whitehorn buck.

There were pale business men from the city, come up to spend a week under the pines, on the ample, sweet bosom of nature, and they secretly determined to give the old hunters a surprise. They had often heard of the buck, and wished in a vaguely spectacular way to kill him, although they would probably have

fainted away had he so much as given them a sight of himself.

Then there were the wealthy, wholesome sportsmen of the Northern Club, robust, good-natured, and fair shots, who longed for a chance at the whitehorn buck. But one and all were foredoomed to disappointment. If hunted too frequently, he would disappear entirely for a month, and all the whooping of drivers and trailing of dogs through his favorite haunts and cover would fail to rouse him. He had gone no one knew where.

So, year after year, the whitehorn buck was hunted, mortally wounded, storied about, and despaired over until, through the whole length and breadth of the Santee country he became a myth, a proverb, a spirit of elusion. And as he stood that winter morning in the gallberry bushes on the edge of the swamp known as the Rattlesnake Drive, he was indeed a fit subject for imaginative stories.

His bearing was superb. The wide, thin-edged nostrils, breathing in the damp and fragrant morning air, the proud defiance of the regal head, the soft, liquid eyes, expressive of so much grace and pride, and the glistening sheen of his dun coat—all made him past description, as his cunning and speed made him

beyond the power of men to capture or to kill.

Yet in that coast country there was one hunter whom the lordly whitehorn buck would have to reckon with. He was the negro poacher, Scipio Lightning.

Scipio was built for the woods. His physical senses were developed like those of a wild animal. His eyesight was that of a harrier hawk; his sense of smell that of the ravens that sun themselves on the lone cypresses along the river; his hearing was as keen as that of a wary old gobbler.

As the years passed, he had seen the woods and the fields over which he had once roamed and hunted at will taken up and posted by rich clubmen. Not that the posting made any particular difference to Scipio; he still hunted about where he pleased, for because of his good nature he was on terms of smiling tolerance with all the watchmen of the game-preserves. And there was not a man on Santee who did not love him for his woodcraft, his strength and endurance, and the stories that he could tell of hunting. From sand-chickens to swamp-bear, there was nothing about the Santee woods or river with which he was not thoroughly conversant.

Yet for all his prowess as a hunter, and for all his matchless skill as a woodsman, Scipio

was weak enough to be superstitious. He said once that he knew where a wahwoo-cat lived. Now a wahwoo-cat is a creature that is supposed to be invisible, and which whimpers and snarls at you out of the darkness. Scipio looked askance at rabbits, and no one ever found him eager to kill a mink. He had his superstitions about them all. And this weakness had a great deal to do with his relations with the whitehorn buck.

He knew almost all that there was to be known about the whitehorn buck. He could show you the warm, sunshiny bed between the green tussocks of broom-grass where he had been dropped as a fawn. He knew in what clump of myrtle-bushes his mother used to leave him when she went far away through the lonely forest to feed. And as for his habits and his haunts, Scipio had them by heart.

He knew that the Rattlesnake Drive was his home; but that when he was hunted hard he went back four or five miles in the woods, and there took refuge in a great swamp known as the Ocean, a vast, impenetrable morass, silent, dreary, haunted.

Yet Scipio took little stock in all the glory and glamour that were gathered about the name and fame of the whitehorn buck. To the

unromantic negro hunter he was only a wary old deer that no white man would be likely to kill. He knew that he himself could shoot him, for Scipio knew how. He would take no dog with him, no horn, no turmoil of galloping horses and loud-mouthed men. He would take only his old musket, loaded with thirty buckshot. Such a charge would stop a dozen deer; but Scipio never made the mistake of undercharging his gun.

So it came about that after the whitehorn buck had been made famous by the sportsmen who had missed him, and after rumors of the great price which would be paid for the horns had been in circulation for some time, Scipio decided to go after the monarch of the pines.

Therefore it happened that on the very same day on which we saw the buck standing so proudly on the edge of the branch, Scipio began his preparations. He gave his musket a thorough overhauling. In the mellow sunlight behind his cabin he cleaned it, washed it inside and out with warm water and soap, dried it, oiled it and loaded it. He primed the nipple carefully, and chose from the shiny box the brightest-looking percussion-cap that he could find. Then he lay down on a bench in the sun and slept till the late afternoon.

The sun was setting in a fire of glory behind the tall, somber pines when Scipio left his cabin. The Rattlesnake Drive was only a mile away, and an easy walk. The negro's long strides would take him there in fifteen minutes, for what he would see on the way—and there would be much to see—would not deter him, now that he had a fixed purpose in mind. All the beauty of the sunset, of the twilight, of the soft coming of the dewy stars, of the mysterious rising of the ghostly mist—these meant nothing to the negro. A single purpose reigned in his heart: he was going to kill the whitehorn buck.

As he walked swiftly down the narrow path that led through the high broom-grass under the pines, he saw the wild life of the night begin to come forth. Once a gray fox came trotting up the path towards him, and seeing him suddenly, almost turned a somersault, and dashed wildly away with his fluffy tail bobbing over the fallen timber. Once a great horned owl on velvet wings floated softly over him:

“Not with a loudly whirring wing,
But like a lady's sigh.”

Once, too, an old raccoon paced sedately down

the length of a hurricane-thrown log without seeing the negro.

Scipio soon came to the Rattlesnake Drive, and entered the thicket. The gallberry-bushes, cold with the dew, wet him up to his knees. He made his way carefully and knowingly to a little strip of high ground in the middle of the branch, a little white, sandy hillock that on the coast would be called a hummock, where stood a few giant pines and a little gathering of scrub-oaks. It was near the plantation end of the drive, and here, he knew, some time during the night, the whitehorn buck would surely come. It was a habit of his, and all his habits were known to Scipio.

So Scipio waded through the swampy thicket, where the sweet-bay bushes brushed him fragrantly, where the huge green water-briers, with their poisonous thorns, caught at him out of the shadows, until he came up on the warm, dry hillock. Here he found two pines fallen across each other. Gathering some of the soft pine needles, he heaped them in one of the corners against the logs, and sat down to wait.

He knew that the buck, after feeding on the deep edges of the branch, would come up on the hill to walk about, to rub himself, and

to dry his legs. Scipio knew that he would be able to hear him far down the swamp, and could see him, too, after moonrise, which was not now more than an hour away.

The negro settled back for his long wait. Across his knees, and grasped by his gaunt and powerful hands, was his musket, the lock covered with the edge of his coat to keep the cap and the powder perfectly dry. About him the great pine woods stretched away in unbroken beauty and stateliness. Mile after mile, like the solemn aisles of some fabulous cathedral, the dark shafts and luminous corridors withdrew into the night. And the music there was the rolling anthem of the pines that softly rose and triumphed and fell, like the waves of some mighty, dreaming ocean, to break at last in far, melodious foam.

After a while the moon rose, and the woods for half a mile in each direction were as clear as day. Once a doe came feeding up to where Scipio sat; he could have touched her with his musket-barrel, but he did not stir. Once a gaunt old red fox trotted swiftly over the hill, urgently bent on business of his own, and Scipio let him pass unmolested.

The radiant moon climbed higher, and the stars wheeled up and by. The infinity of the

night grew vaster. Midnight, with its mystery, came and went. Scipio was growing chill. So far there had been no signs of the great personage whom he awaited.

It would soon be too late for him to feed. Scipio grew anxious. But he need not have been, for when the negro entered one end of the drive, the buck had come in the other, and had been browsing up toward the sand-hill.

When he was still two hundred yards away, Scipio heard a bay-bush crack. Ten minutes later he heard the petulant rap of horns against a young tupelo-tree. Five minutes more, and Scipio saw clearly, not more than fifty yards away, the gleam of snowy antlers.

He ran no risk with a long shot, for after forty yards buckshot are very uncertain. He waited. The whitehorn buck came up to the edge of the sand-hill, quartering to the negro. Scipio, who at the first sound had rested his musket on the log before him, now tilted it gently until he saw the brass sight shine against the white patch behind the buck's fore leg. The gun tightened against his shoulder; he steadied it with all the strength of his powerful arms; he pressed the trigger!

"Ti-a-a-rr!" echoed the cap, derisively, and the buck, seeming to jump seven ways at once,

and fifteen feet in each direction, straightened out at a tremendous speed down the branch. The powder had slipped down in the nipple, the cap had popped, and the whitehorn buck was getting away!

Yet Scipio held his sight on him, hoping that the charge might still ignite. But all in vain. The great buck thundered on down the edge of the drive, and was soon lost to sight among the glimmering pines. Scipio lowered his musket in disgust. Yet there was more than disappointment and chagrin on his face; there was superstition and downright fear. He looked furtively about him, and then struck off in a fox-trot toward home. Nor did he slacken his pace until he was in sight of his lonely little cabin that slept in the peaceful moonlight.

If one might read Scipio's heart, one would find that the negro believes that he was trying to shoot at a spirit, or that some strange power was working against him. Never before and never since that night can he remember his musket's failing him. So he goes no more to stalk the whitehorn buck. And that old monarch who bears the glorious antlers should be thankful in the thought that the best hunter in that country is superstitious.

VI

O RINGING BELLS!

WHEN Dave Mordaunt rose to the surface of those raving waters, instead of striking out for the sandy mound that jutted oddly out of the murky tumult of waves, he paused to look about him.

"Here, Bells!" he called. Though his eyes were anxious his voice was not excited. It was clear and well pitched.

For reply the rain slashed him savagely in the face, and the wind shrilled derisively in his ears. But his determination was resolute. He would not start for safety without Bells. Once more, treading the storm water, he called with shrewd clearness across the waves. Then a tousled white form appeared, baffled by the roaring elements. It struggled incontinently. But when she heard Dave's voice, the setter turned to him as the trembling needle sets steady and true toward the north. There came a happy yelp from the swimming dog. Ringing Bells was calling to her master.

"Come on, dog," shouted Dave. "It's

pretty near time we were going," he added grimly.

Another glad yelp answered this; and in a moment the delicately molded head was swimming beside the grizzled face of her owner. Bells did not know where they were going. It was enough that she was with Dave, and that he spoke to her kindly though commandingly. And when, ten minutes later, the two came ashore on the only refuge on the storm-swept delta, the little English setter appeared ready for further adventures if Dave would but say the word. And Dave knew that there would be no trouble on that score; if Bells wished adventures, they were sure to be thronging in soon. As he sat down on the packed wet sand with his back to the tearing wind, he called her to him.

"Bells," he said, as she laid her head between his knees and looked up at him with reverent and adoring eyes, "do you know, girl, what's done gone and happened to us? We never had no business a-leavin' home when we saw them clouds making up in the northeast. Now we have done capsized, and that case of duckshot shells has done helped to sink our canoe. My gun's down there under that water somewheres. We got to this place all

right; but how long the wind and tide are going to let us stay here is more than I know. We're a far ways from any other high land, and that I'm tellin' you."

The shrieking wind continued to drive in across the dim expanse of delta marsh, now almost topped by the vast tide that, sweeping in from the near-by ocean, was fast flooding the low-lying country adjacent to the river's mouth. The wind was full of gusty flaws that spat sharp raindrops keenly. Over Cedar Island, which stood as a dark coastal barrier between the waste delta and the sea, a strange yellowish light brooded in the dreadful heart of the on-rushing storm. A West Indian cyclone was coming up the Carolina coast in all its original and elemental fury and it boded frightful menace to all things in its path.

It lacked two hours to sundown; but a hurricane such as this one can merge day and night into swift blackness. To east and west of the wide delta, the mainland, where stood stately forests of pine, was first misted, then dimmed, then darkened, and at last extinguished. The wild tide, the dreadful cloud, the insane wind had their way with the delta. And the bleak rain connived to hide the desolation wrought. But as yet the mound on which the man and his

dog had taken refuge remained above the waters.

This strange tiny island was a place little known even to the inhabitants of the country bordering on the delta. But Dave Mordaunt, having for a lifetime ranged those lonely regions of the river, knew it; and when the storm had cut him off from the mainland, he had straightway headed his canoe for the mound. Dave not only knew of the existence of it; he knew its origin as well. A half century before, when rice growing had been a flourishing industry of the delta country, there had existed the same menace from cyclones; and this great mound of earth had been erected near the center of the delta by a league of planters. The long years of erosion had worn it down to only a fraction of its original height; but it still remained the highest point in all that vast marshy region. When Dave Mordaunt and his dog reached it in this storm it was still about three feet above the water line, and the area of the part as yet uncovered was nearly half an acre.

"I'm glad to get on this place," said Dave, stroking thoughtfully the head of Bells, "but I'll be durn glad to get off here, too. She shouldn't rise no more than another foot; but," he added with grave uncertainty, "that's the

yallerest cloud over Cedar Island that ever I seen."

It was not the first time he had lost his boat and his gun. But somehow this experience was going to be different from all the others. He felt sure of it.

"This thing," he mused sternly, "is gwine to be a hurricane. I smell it."

But as long as he continued to stroke the white setter's head, a legion of hurricanes could not perturb her.

Dave Mordaunt could never have been called an excitable man. He had sometimes found inaction better than action. Wherefore it was his nature thus to sit on the sodden mound of sand, barely rising above a waste of tossing waters, calmly stroking the head of his beloved dog while the rain drove like sharp shrapnel against his broad back and the fiendish wind whipped him cruelly.

Having fought wind and weather for forty years, Dave knew the danger of his position; but he also had learned what is the graduating lesson in common sense—not to worry. He realized that he could hardly hope for some one to save him. The only escape lay less in the man's exertions than in an abating of the fury of the storm. And for this letting up of the

hurricane, Dave Mordaunt, making Ringing Bells crouch between his knees for shelter, waited with a grim patience.

But that waiting was vain. What brought Dave to a realization of this was a certain wild and eerie sight, more like a vision than a view of real things, that, during a strange lull in the rain, he saw to the southward. A sharp veering away of the cyclone between his refuge and Cedar Island had caused a dark line of trees to reappear on the seaward horizon—tall warriors they were, in black armor and in single file marching riverward. The man's eyes were now upon them, for they seemed like strong friends, bringing to him reassurance. But even as Dave looked, the tall pines that had towered against the storms of a century, and that now seemed symbolic of a mastering strength, suddenly went down like a whisper. Through the seaward gap thus vividly made Dave could see the utter wildness of the ocean. All that savage and conquering wildness was moving resistlessly northward across the delta toward Dave's precarious place of refuge.

Already the man noted with a hardening light in his eyes that the sandy mound, which had been three feet out of water on his arrival, was now scarce one foot up. Though he had

sat down with Bells on the highest point of the hillock, the waters were now upon them. Dave had to draw in his feet. The feathered tail of Ringing Bells was awash. Strangely, and it seemed to the doomed man very suddenly, he was left in a wilderness of waters. The pines of Cedar Islands, drifting logs, floating sedge, had all vanished.

Standing in a crouched and braced position with his back to the howling storm, and with Bells standing with her forefeet on his shoulders and her head within the shelter of his breast, he made up his mind what to do.

"Bells," he said, "you have always been a good dog, and I've tried to be a good master to you, using you right. You have always minded me, and you will mind me now, I know. Now, listen, girl. Across the river yonder is home. You can make it. It's hard going, but you can do it. If you stay here, you sure will have to take drownin'. There ain't no use of your bein' drowned, Bells. I reckon I'll have to stay here and take what is comin' to me; but when I say, 'Go home!' I want you to go and go straight. . . . Understand me, little girl?"

More from the tone of the soft commanding voice than from the bitter driving of the wind and rain that whipped her flanks, Ringing

Bells began to shiver. She always knew when Dave wanted her to carry out some plan of his. Dave Mordaunt lifted her weight from his breast and crouched low with her on the crest of the mound.

"Yonder's home," he said, pointing away to the westward. "Go, Bells! Go home, girl!"

The snowy little setter gave a yelp of understanding. A moment more and she had entered the wild waters. She knew the direction. She knew what Dave had told her to do; and since the time when she had played as a little, white, innocent puppy at his feet, there in the humble home under the live oaks overlooking the river, she had learned implicitly to trust and to obey the quiet hunter of the delta. He had never fooled her. He had taught her all she knew; and the greatest thing she had learned was obedience.

The man crouched on his desolate refuge, trying to follow with his weary eyes the swimming white form. But she had gotten away quickly; and now the scudding of the rain and the wild spume that was lashed up by the wind hid that desperate stretch of waters. Once, indeed, far off he thought he saw a white form suddenly glimmer and flash. But it might have been a breaking wave. Dave knew, how-

ever, that Bells would reach home. For one thing, her long and arduous training as a ducking dog had made her an excellent, hardy swimmer; for another, he had told her to go. And despite the apparent hopelessness of his own position, Dave Mordaunt had a gladness warming his heart. At least, Bells would be safe.

Though the larger waves were now breaking freely over the mound, the marooned man gave small heed to them. He was not afraid. The time had not come for him to think of himself; he was too busily thinking of little Ringing Bells and her valiant obedience.

It was in no foolish hope that her going might help him, that he had sent her home; for Dave Mordaunt was a lonely man, having neither wife nor parents, neither son nor daughter. His only relative was his brother Ben, a man much like him, who lived some two miles down the river from Dave's place.

"She'll get home," the man kept saying, "but I want her to get nigh there before I start; for if she knows I'm comin', she'll turn back. It looks mightily like drownin' for me; but leastways I can drown a little nearer home than this, and I can go down fightin'. I think the water will treat me better than this here crazy wind. When she ketches me to knees,

I'll pull out; and though mayhap I'll founder right off there where my boat went down, it will not be just like standin' still and lettin' the tide come in and take me. It's a man's business, I reckon, to fight till he's done for. Anyway, the little one, she's safe. . . . And I'm coming after you, Bells."

It was not now a question of Dave's taking the water, for the water took him. Already the waves were breaking about his waist, and vehement currents were tugging at his knees, when he stepped down into the surging water.

There was now no gleam in the northern sky; and the only light was the disastrous and lurid glow that the hurricane cast. But this was as inconstant as the raving wind itself; for when Dave began to swim, it actually afforded him a glimpse of the farther shore; yet ere he had gone a rod a sudden darkness closed down upon the scene. He had a sense, though he had no sight, of the distant shore.

The lone swimmer, laboring on, rolled by the hurrying waves, smitten sharply by wind and driven spume, had one thought that glowed in his heart: he knew that Ringing Bells would have reached home by now. Even as he blindly swam he seemed to see the white setter making the shore, shaking her draggled coat

in the shelter of one of the huge live oaks, and then crawling into the snug bed of straw that her master had made for her under the cabin's high porch. Then another thought came to Dave.

What would become of Bells when he did not come ashore? His mind flashed to a cabin like his own down the river—his brother Ben's.

"He'll take her," he thought; "and he'll be good to her, though nobody will ever understand her same as I do. . . . He'll keep her to 'member me by."

Such were the swimmer's thoughts. He was a strong swimmer, to whom the breadth of the river would ordinarily have meant nothing. But now his attempt was to cross both it and the delta, and to do it in a storm. Not for a moment did he let himself think that the thing could not be done; but Dave Mordaunt was sane enough to realize, even in the unabating excitement of such an experience, that the odds were vastly against him. Yet that was the very reason he hardened his heart to do the desperate thing that had been forced upon him by the coming of the hurricane. He swam steadily with all his skill and with not more strength than he needed to exert; but what he needed was almost all he had.

There was no way for him to know of the progress he was making. He feared, indeed, that he had lost his sense of direction. The dim bulk of the sea islands, the blur to westward that had marked the river bank, the faint light in the sky over the delta to the north—all these were now shut out. But despite the fact that, for all he knew, he might be headed back for the mound, or northward up the river, or seaward under a blinding veer of the wind, Dave kept steadily on. . . . But not even a strong man can perform the impossible. . . . It was a half hour after he had left the inundated hillock that the swimmer felt himself going.

Though realizing the desperate nature of the battle he was waging, Dave Mordaunt would not admit to himself that he was drowning.

"Not yet!" he gasped, as, out of the black depths of the waters into which he had sunk, he rose to their stormy surface.

"Sink! Sin-k-k-k-k!" sobbed a great white wave, submerging him.

"Now! Now!" shrilled the mad wind in his ears as he went down.

"Not yet," muttered Dave. But his heart was sick, and his voice was no more than a wet groan.

"Soon! Soon!" shouted the crazy wind exultantly. And Dave knew that it was so. His thoughts went again to his dog.

"Bells," he gasped—"little Bells—Ben, he'll care for you."

The man's gnarled brown arms that had been wide for swimming, now swept convulsively together on the surface. The rude fingers met in a handclasp. Dave Mordaunt gave his soul over to God.

"For the sea is His," his heart said, "and He made it."

A moment thus he lay strangely on the surface, with waves rocking him not ungently; but then their forward rolling divulged his form no more. Dave had gone down; but his fight had been a brave one.

But the drowning man, far under the deep river's tide, felt a last hot rebellion against his fate. With terrible strength he beat his way upward out of the murk. He came to the surface all but unconscious.

Dave's unutterably weary eyes, heavy with the importunate summons of death's long sleep, opened dimly to the storm. But they opened wider as a strange object bulked in the grayness. It was portentous and black. There was something white on it. The man was not

without superstition. He believed this to be the end.

Suddenly a sharp glad bark thrilled him, shocking him out of oblivion. Then a snowy form leaped from the black hulk. It swam toward Dave. Swiftly it came alongside, and over its warm strength the man dragged a dead arm.

“O God!” he gasped, “you done sent Bells for me!”

An hour later he was at home, lying on a rude couch before a crackling fire. On one side sat his brother Ben; and on the other, with her eyes never taken from her master’s face, crouched Ringing Bells. Ben, a woodsman, bronzed until he was almost black, was a man of few words; but he could make his meaning clear enough.

“In the middle of the storm,” he was saying to his brother, “Bells, she come to my house. And she made it plain that I must come to the river. Something was wrong, I knew. I come by here through the rain; and not finding you, I says to myself, ‘More than likely he’s over on yon mound, but he can’t stay there.’ By that time Bells, she was down at the river, barking. Three times she swam off, but I got her back. Then I took the 12-foot oars and

the big sturgeon boat—'tain't another craft could have come across that river—and we found you. Bells, she saw you afore I did," he added.

In the silence that followed, the snowy setter crept closer to the couch. Her eyes of utter faithfulness sought Dave's face. Dave's eyes were closed; but by instinct his hand moved toward her, searching. Ben understood his brother; for he took Dave's hand gently and laid it on the head of Ringing Bells.

VII

ANY ONE'S TURKEY

THE turkey-blind was a simple affair, made of green boughs leaning against two pines which stood almost together. Beyond the blind was a thin trail of peas and rice tailings on a strip of open ground, skilfully sprinkled with pine trash. All around the blind was a knee-high growth of dark-green gallberry bushes; then came the sweet myrtles with their cool and fragrant foliage; then the deep swamp where the turkeys roosted, with its tall gum trees, its shadowy tupelos, its towering elms, and its whispering poplars; beyond the swamp lay the wide, mysterious pinewoods, lonely, baffling. This spot was on Colonel Jocelyn's plantation, not far from the Great House and almost too near the negro cabins. But the Colonel's code of honor was rigid, even to the point that he stooped not to suspecting even the lowest of his fellow creatures. And he was more than this. He carried his trust to the point of temptation. He proved this when he got Scipio to build the turkey-

blind for him, in spite of the fact that rumors with regard to Scipio's persistent poaching and unreliability had come to his ears. Colonel Jocelyn did not believe it. He had known Scipio too long; there was not a better negro on his plantation or any other. The Colonel expressed this judgment with some explosive emphasis to his frail, quiet-eyed little wife; and so, when on his way home from a deer hunt, he saw the turkeys go to roost one twilight, he sent for Scipio the next day and told him with great secrecy, in a sportsman's whisper, of the turkeys. Insamuch as Scipio had found the nest in the summer, he had every turkey in the brood marked from the time when they came out of the speckled eggs; and inasmuch as, out of the twenty, he had already killed and sold seven, it required not a little diplomacy to express surprise at their discovery. Yet Scipio's praise and admiration of the Colonel's acuteness was in no wise failing. He listened with great attentiveness, and gravely assented to the Colonel's plan. Yes, he would build it right away; and he would get the rice tailings from the barnyard that very morning; oh, yes, he knew the very spot where his boss wanted the blind put. Did he think the turkeys would take the feed? There was no doubt of it.

Had Scipio seen them before? Not Scipio; he had not seen a wild turkey on the plantation for years; it was a miracle to him how his boss was so keen as to mark them down; his boss seemed a younger and a better woodsman every day. And, yes, Scipio would surely let him know the first time the turkeys took the feed.

After this conversation the Colonel walked briskly into the house, kissed his little wife affectionately, whistled a catch of an old love song, popular long before the War, and then went out to see the rice-thrashing in the barnyard. And wherever he went, Secret was written on every feature and found expression in every movement.

Meanwhile Scipio had, in all faith, built and baited the blind. He knew very well that the Colonel would forget all about it; that all his enthusiasm and spirit were as transient as a flash of sunlight through some dark door; that the turkeys were his if he could but keep up his cunning and his courage.

The very next day after the blind had been completed, Wash Green, returning from an intimate and friendly visit to some one else's potato bank on the neighboring plantation, and having in his possession that which was not intended for public inspection, took a short cut

through the swamp and almost walked into the turkey-blind. He saw that it was freshly made and that no hogs had touched the bait; he noticed its location and guessed its purpose with self-applauding cunning. When he got home he brought his old smooth-bore musket down from the loft over his parlor and, drawing the buckshot, poured half a handful of No. 3's into the barrel and wadded it down with some black moss. Now, he thought, he would steal a march on that sly Scipio who had, time and again, thwarted him, and made him a subject of jest and laughter. Now if he, Wash Green, could slip into that turkey-blind early the next morning and bring home a fine gobbler, the chagrin of Scipio, who was always so proud about his hunting, would be acute and his defeat most mortifying. Wash always relished his victories before they came; he was wise in this where it was a question of getting the better of Scipio, for such victories never actually arrived.

And Scipio, while down in his heart he hated to deceive the Colonel, who had always been so fair and just to him, was fully prepared to make the blind a success. He, too, loaded his musket with big buckshot, and went to bed with his mind on the "moondown" as the time for

him to be stirring. And when the moon, almost full—which all night long had sailed in lonely splendor over the purple pine woods, flooding the plantation fields and the great river, which moved slowly seaward, with her mysterious light—began to sink on the bosom of the pine forest, Scipio awoke and, stretching his arms, shuffled to the door. Yes, it was time for him to start. At “day-clean” turkeys flew down. He would be on hand if they came to the blind, but he hardly thought they would take the feed the first morning.

All night Scipio had been dozing in front of the fire with his clothes on; so, by merely reaching for his cap and musket he was ready to start. When he got outside of the cabin the morning air was chill and he buttoned his coat more closely about him. In doing so he felt in the pocket for his box of percussion caps. They were not there. He felt himself with growing and anxious excitement, but the caps were not to be found. Scipio swore softly. There was no use for him to go without the caps. He leaned his musket against the palings of his little garden and went back into the cabin. He must have been gone twenty minutes, and when he reappeared he had the caps but had lost his temper. He plunged out of

the door, grasped his musket and disappeared in a fox-trot down the narrow path which led through the broom grass from his cabin to the pine woods. But the day had already come; in the east the pale colors were brightening and the sky overhead had its day-blue. The blind was half a mile away, and he would be fortunate if he got there before the turkeys flew down.

His gait took him through the woods swiftly. He was unconscious of their cool and dewy sweetness, their delicious freshness, their serene beauty and tranquillity; he knew only that before him, beyond a certain blind, a dozen wild turkeys might be at their breakfast, and that he might be too late to surprise them. As he got near the place, his anger was replaced by caution; his vehement pace slackened, and he bent low as he crept behind the blind. He slunk from pine to pine, keeping his sight on the clump of green bushes before him; as he came nearer and nearer he disappeared almost entirely in the gallberry bushes. And then, when he was thirty feet away, he was transfixed by something which caught his eye suddenly. He saw a movement in the blind before him. Scipio fell flat in the bushes, bewildered and amazed. Could it be Colonel Jocelyn? If

so, he was keener than Scipio had imagined. If it was the Colonel, the presence of Scipio's musket would be embarrassing. Slowly, and with infinite caution, Scipio, without bending his knees, raised himself on his hands and peered over the bushes. He could see nothing. A loose branch had fallen over the entrance of the blind and hidden its occupant. Even while Scipio peered there came a mighty roar from the blind, and every aperture seemed to belch forth smoke. Then Scipio sprang up and, flattening himself behind a big pine, peered forth. What he saw filled him with surprise, anger, and the spirit of vengeance. He saw Wash Green plunge out of the blind, hat in hand, and rush out on the open space where the bait lay. He saw him run down toward the edge of the swamp, stoop down, and rise with a magnificent bronze gobbler held in his hand. Scipio gulped hard, and his thoughts crowded fast. His mind was already made up when Wash, twenty yards away, turned his back and again looked toward the swamp. He had swung the gobbler over his shoulder and had replaced his old, creased black-felt hat jauntily on the side of his head. And so he stood for a moment, a picture of satisfaction and of debonair content.

Scipio had sometimes had occasion to call to him many wild animals which had thereby fallen before his musket. He knew, too, how to imitate the voices of men. With sudden decision he jerked his musket to his shoulder:

"Ha, nigger!" cried Colonel Jocclyn's irate voice, and as it reached the ears of Wash, Scipio's musket roared forth. Wash's black-felt hat flew off and lodged in a myrtle bush; Wash himself sprang into the air as if preparatory to aerial flight; the gobbler fell to the earth, and the terrified negro crashed through the bushes, screaming and rubbing his head with both hands. He did not look back, but ran on and on, screaming louder and louder as he found the shot had not hurt him. And so he disappeared.

After a few minutes Scipio came out from the shelter of his pine. He fixed up the blind and then walked down to the gobbler and the felt hat. He took the latter out of the bush and grinned as he looked at it. There were five tiny holes through the top of it, front and back. He stuffed it into his pocket, picked up the gobbler and, stopping at the blind to get Wash's musket, was soon on the path homeward.

It was some time before Wash returned

home, and as Scipio's cabin was near his, Scipio sat on his steps and watched for the return of the wanderer. They were far enough apart to make it safe for Scipio to grin, as he had ample reason to when he saw the dejected form of Wash Green emerge from the pines and slink along to his cabin. The next morning Scipio's rival found his musket with his cap on the end of it leaning up against his door. And to this day he has not had the courage to thank Colonel Jocelyn for returning them.

VIII

THE GOLDEN ROBBER

WITH that directness of purpose characteristic of the flight of his kind, the great golden eagle beat his way powerfully up the waste delta of the Santee. It was in June; and the wild fowl that had wintered along the Southern coast had long since departed, although here and there in the marshes that fringed the wide yellow river there still lurked crippled ducks that would have to spend the summer in the South.

As the lordly eagle swept onward, over sentinel cypresses and silent lagoons, over canebrakes and fields of wild wampee, he was a veritable king of the air, and he surveyed with the eye of a monarch the rich rice-fields and the dreamy plantations beneath him. But from the mouth of the river upward his quest had brought him nothing; so he turned from the delta to the vast tracts of pine, at that season of the year the abode of more forms of life legitimately the eagle's prey than the delta. Crossing the Santee opposite Mazyck's Cut,

and driving on over Hampton Place, he passed high above the great white house in its grove of live-oaks, and over the group of negro cabins beyond the corn-fields. Lower over the pines he swept, while his round, unlidged eyes searched the thickets, the shimmering green savannas, and the sunny spaces of broom-sedge beneath him. Swerving suddenly, he checked himself in his great flight, circled twice as swiftly as a simitar cuts the air, and dropped like a plummet through the pines.

Beneath the terrible falling body of this golden robber, a tiny fawn drowsing between matted tufts of broom-sedge, lay, unaware of the enemy descending upon it. With its delicate coat glistening in the sun, its white star spots softly aglow, and its diminutive, delicately modeled hoofs, the fawn was an object of beauty. It seemed strange that so frail and delicate a creature should be lying there alone in the wild pine forest. And it was not really alone; for at the edge of the near-by myrtle thicket the mother, a slim young doe, was feeding, alert to every sound or shadow that broke the stillness of the great woods or that darkened the sky above her.

She saw the eagle when the eagle spied her fawn, and the effort of each to reach the little

creature first became a mad rush. And because the huge bird saw the doe coming to the protection of her baby, and because the fawn itself, becoming aware of the black shadow above it, struggled unsteadily to its feet, swaying on its delicate legs, the eagle missed the goal of his first savage rush. His wide wings swept the fawn, but his curved talons closed on air; and as he beat his way up ponderously, the mother, bounding over the grass, reached the fawn, nuzzled it until it stood under her; then, palpitating but defiant, she turned to face the great eagle circling above her, and awaiting a favorable chance for another attack.

There was silence in the solitary woods—the deep silence of a summer mid-afternoon. The squirrels were all drowsing in their holes; the lurking coveys of bob-white were dusting themselves on the sandy hillocks where black-jack grew; in the thickets the towhees and brown thrashers for once were not rustling the dry leaves; even the assiduous nuthatches had ceased their acrobatic performances in the pines, and here and there peered plaintively over the edges of the stout limbs on which they were crouched. Brightly the sun gleamed on the hushed thickets, the motionless pines, the sleep-



"BUT THE GOLDEN EAGLE WAS NOT TO BE BAFFLED BY A
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ing glades; and in the brightness and silence this tragedy of the wild was going forward; the primeval savage hunger of the eagle pitted against the wonderful love of the mother doe.

Although this was the doe's first fawn, she seemed to understand fully the nature of its peril; but the fawn apparently considered it some strange new game that its mother had arranged for its benefit. Every few seconds it would frisk its little fluffy tail, take pert and jerky steps here and there, and peer out from its shelter with mischief gleaming in its great brown eyes. But the mother never doubted the reality of the danger from the circling bird above her; she never relaxed her vigilance. Knowing that in a constant watchfulness lay the only chance of safety for her fawn, her watch became a feverish insistence of alertness.

But the golden eagle was not to be baffled by a young doe's defiance. He circled more swiftly, and drew nearer; he whirled above her head with marvelous agility for so great a body, swerved suddenly, and dashed his gripping talons toward the playful fawn. The mother reared and struck out fiercely with her hoofs. The fawn, whose tender flank had been gashed by one of the eagle's long curved talons,

was frightened and cowering now. The eagle swept over the back of the doe, and alighted on a pine log lying near. In another moment he rose oddly on curved wings and threw himself at the bewildered mother.

There was a frantic struggle, in which the bleating of the fawn sounded piteously; there was the rasp of hoofs against tough feathers, and the panting of the doe. And when at last she did beat off the winged robber, her tongue was out, her flanks heaved, and from her glossy sides the blood steadily dripped until the grass beneath her, and the little fawn, now huddled up in terror, were flecked with red.

The eagle had not risen from the ground, but was perched grimly on a heavy tussock of broom-sedge, whence he watched with cold eyes the distress of his victims.

And now in the forest sounds began to awake. A soft wind breathed through the pines, and they murmured and waved; a towhee whistled in the myrtle thicket; a bob-white, standing on the burned base of an old pine stump, gave his mellow, ringing call; and somewhere far off a crow was cawing in his careless fashion. The nuthatches, too, like traveling mountebanks, resumed their topsy-turvy performances.

But the sounds were quite as unavailing as

the silence had been to end happily the grim siege that had set in. One more attack like the former might so weaken and bewilder the doe that she could no longer defend her darling from the powerful eagle. She dared not lead her fawn to the friendly shelter of the thicket; for the grass tussocks were difficult to cross, the little fawn unsteady on its legs, and the exposure of even a moment might be fatal. It was wonderful that the doe knew that she must stay where she was and finish the fight where she had begun it. Nor had she been so far entirely worsted, for the ground at her feet was strewn with feathers that her sharp hoofs had torn from the eagle in her frantic efforts to keep him away from her precious little one. There were flecks of blood also on her black hoofs.

But her stand had not dismayed the king of the air. Even now he gripped the tussock more firmly, leaned over calmly and wiped his shining beak on the grass; then, crouching with lowered head and lifted wings, he launched himself savagely at the head of the doe.

He cleared her forefeet as she beat out at him, and sank his long talons in her neck, only to release them and hurl himself over her back and down her side, beneath which the

fawn, somehow reconciled to the extraordinary events, but looking up now and then with great eyes full of sorrowful wonder, lay licking his hurts.

The wary doe divined the eagle's purpose, and whirled in time to thwart him, and to receive in her own flank the hot grip of the talons. Bleating sorrowfully, she shook the great creature off. She turned, staggered on her legs, and sank back on her haunches; her wonderful liquid eyes were full of that dread question that looks from the eyes of hunted innocence.

The eagle was now close to her on the ground, but she did not have the assurance to strike at him. Moreover, her fawn lay only partly in shelter, and she was afraid that any movement of hers away from the spot might expose the little one. From her wide eyes of grief, she seemed to know that the golden robber would get her baby, her first-born; but like a true mother she would defend it to the death. From a score of wounds she was now bleeding, and her convulsive gasps of fear and exhaustion told only too well the story of her suffering.

The eagle was apparently unharmed. Perhaps he had grown a bit warier, but he was

still relentless. Crouching once again low to the ground, he summoned his energy and his craftiness for the final attack. His keen eyes glistened, his great beak was thrust forward, and his talons were tingling for the fatal grip.

But he did not launch himself on the bleeding and helpless doe, for out of the thicket came the sound of a step, then a shadow, then the uncouth figure of a negro turpentine hand, returning from his long day's work in the pine forest. His coat and his dinner-bucket were swung on a black-jack stick over his shoulder; his tattered trousers hung in ribbons about his bare feet. On his head was what had once been a derby hat, of which the rim alone now remained. He was softly humming an old negro melody as he plodded homeward, thinking of the dinner that awaited him in his cabin.

Suddenly emerging from the bay bushes, he came face to face with the strange, dramatic scene.

"Kingdom come," he ejaculated, "dat is a pow'ful eagle!"

The eagle heard and saw and hesitated. But the great bird knew his ancient enemy too well. Rising on labored pinions, he beat his way up through the pines, and went soaring off toward the delta of the Santee.

The poor doe, freed from one peril, faced, as she thought, a worse one. But the ragged negro had a good heart. Far off through the lonely pine woods there was a cabin and a little brown baby, who would toddle up the sandy road to meet him and crow at his coming. So he merely stood there quietly, not wishing to frighten the mother further, yet wanting to make sure that the eagle did not return. Tremulously and cautiously, then, nosing the fawn before her with every furtive step, the wounded doe made her way slowly toward the fastness of the deep thicket, into which she and her little one disappeared.

When they were out of sight, the negro walked over to where the combat had been fought. There he picked up a big wing-feather, a feather torn by the frantic mother from the golden robber. An hour later, when the doe and fawn were in safety, the feather was delighting a little brown baby, who rolled with it on the cabin floor while he tickled his toes and gurgled his infant joy.

IX

THE HAUNTED OAK

GENERAL WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN has much to do with this story; indeed, he is the real author; for if he had not marched so perilously close to the Rivers plantation, certain incidents would not have occurred. The faithful negroes would never have ransacked the house so frantically and carried off so much furniture into places of safety. But particularly the Rivers family silver and the great tea service of gold, which had been presented in Revolutionary days to Randolph Rivers by the colony he had so conspicuously served, would never have been concealed with such fatal security. In the graves behind Sherman's march, bodies were buried; but stranger were the things buried in the graves that were hastily dugged in front of the invading army's advance.

The Rivers family was absent when the plantation was menaced with the invasion of the Northern army. All the men were at the front. Roxane Rivers and her daughter were

in Charleston. They had come down from the plantation some weeks before, and they had left orders that, if any peril approached, Old Jason was to direct the disposal of the valuables of the house. Old Jason was the dusky autocrat who ruled all things and all people in the Plantation home, even the Rivers family itself, every member of which was willing to defer to the wise old negro's judgment on certain matters. When a friend in the city asked Roxane Rivers how she could leave her home in the country open, she replied that with Old Jason there it was safer than if she herself were there, for he would take much better care of everything than she could. For all things belonging to the Rivers family, Old Jason's was a jealous love; and of its apprehending ear and penetrating eye all the other negroes stood in awe. Not one of them would have dared to sleep in the Great House at night; but Old Jason slept there at night and stayed there all day, a faithful guardian of his master's possessions.

But when strange, wild rumors, such as war alone can bring, began to travel up into the peaceful plantation regions; when some of the younger negroes began to leave the places and to straggle off to follow the alluring wake of

the victorious army; and when, distinctly borne on the western wind, came the dull throb of distant firing, Old Jason knew that the crisis had come. He therefore sent for twelve of the strongest negroes, apportioned to each some valuables of which they were to take charge, and despatched them into the gloomy recesses of Spencer's Swamp, a vast and melancholy woodland wilderness that bordered the Rivers' lands. This strange procession made its way slowly down the sandy road and out of the plantation gateway. There were some astonishing feats done in that march. Tall Samson, true to his name, gathered to himself the huge mahogany sideboard and bore it off with amazing ease; Jehu carried the stately andirons from the fireplace of the ballroom, and they glinted in the sun as far as eye could follow him; Tony bore away five great mirrors that shot dazzling beams of reflected sunlight from the fields to the crests of the pines and back again; Esau, the plantation "hunterman," was appropriately charged with the care of the guns and pistols in the house, and he was loaded down with old duelling-pieces and silver-chased English fowling-guns.

It was not until the last of these negroes had disappeared into the forest that Old Ja-

son, with trembling hands, took the huge iron key that he kept hidden on his person and opened the deep closet where, he knew, the family silver and the gorgeous gold tea service were kept. In the shadowy recesses they glimmered from the shelves. Hanging near by were silk cases, some of which had come with the set; others, Jason's mistress, with the patient skill of a woman's hands of the old days, had made. The negro knew every piece of silver and gold, and he knew in which bag each one belonged. Had it not been his especial pride for almost a lifetime to rub them with chamois skin until they glowed in the shade or glittered in the sunlight?

Gently now he lifted down each piece with a care that only fidelity can bestow. The smaller ones he took first, until he felt sure of himself. Then followed the massy pieces, solid and marvelously chased. Each was slipped carefully into its bag. No one knew so well as Old Jason how to do this. Roxane Rivers had often said that in forty years he had never dented a piece of silver. Nor did the old man dent one piece now, although he was alone and excited, and the greatest responsibility of his life was upon him.

He had brought to the closet a large sack

full of rice straw. This he emptied on the floor of the closet. Now, as each piece of silver or gold was slipped into its silk case, Old Jason placed it gently in the big sack, packing about it snugly soft layers of the straw that he crushed in his strong hands. At length the task was done. The ancient servitor felt far back on each shelf, but there was nothing more. The large sack was nearly full. Old Jason tied it up; then he backed out of the closet, locked the door, shouldered the heavy sack gingerly, and made his way stealthily out of the house. He had sent all the other negroes toward Spencer's Swamp; when he reached the foot of the steps, he started in exactly the opposite direction.

In not meeting a soul in the course that he had taken, Old Jason succeeded in carrying out the first part of his plan. And when once he had passed through the shrubbery and across the pasture field, entering forthwith a primeval wood, he knew that he would not be followed. Of this he was positive; for he had determined to secrete the Rivers' treasure in the negro burying ground, into the mournful beauty of whose shades he had now come. No one on the whole plantation would follow him into that dread abode; and nothing but love and

utter faithfulness ever induced Old Jason so to master his natural aversions to such a region as to enter it himself.

In the gloomy fastness of that sanctuary, nearer the rice fields than the road, there stood a great live oak; a vast tree whose huge, tolerant limbs spread far out over the sweet-smelling jungles of myrtle and jasmine vines. It was more than a century old, and the gray moss that draped its limbs with melancholy grace enhanced its ancient and venerable appearance. So stately was the tree that about it brooded a spirit, and this spirit seemed to interpret the mystery and the awfulness of the woodland graveyard.

In this oak, near the ground, was a huge hollow; and there was no negro on the Rivers plantation who did not believe, and who did not derive a certain fearsome pleasure from his belief, that it was the home of a graveyard "hant." Now, to the negro mind, a hant is not merely a spirit or a ghost; it is a ghost, a fiend, a loupgarou, all in one. In that word is conjured all the terrors of night, of silence, and of the grave. So it was that this oak, whose presence was known by every one within miles of the plantation, was seldom looked upon, even from afar, by human eyes. When

there were 'coon and possum hunts at night, and the dogs happened to take a trail toward the great oak, the dusky hunters would pause, turn aside, and if peculiarly sensitive, would consider it an opportune time to go home. Once in the distant past a dog which had trailed toward the oak had not returned; but no negro would believe the plausible thing—that he had been caught by an alligator in the rice-fields—but insisted that a “hant” had made way with the unfortunate creature. Even at times of funerals, when large groups of negroes would enter the dread sanctuary, they avoided approaching the haunted oak; and the glances which they cast in its direction through the woodland were wary and furtive. Once when one of these solemn processions had inadvertently headed for the oak, it had, upon perceiving its fatal course, retraced its steps with too much speed for dignity.

To this ancient tree Old Jason now bore his treasure. As he went deeper and deeper into the thickets approaching the oak, he began to talk to himself, knowing well that no human ear could hear him. Moreover, the sound of his voice broke the ghostly stillness suspended eerily about him, giving him a sense of human reassurance.

"I is safe now," he said, meaning that his treasure was safe, as he felt anything but safe. "This is the grabeyaad. I done do the thing I was to do. Thank God for that! I'se so glad that the silber and the gole is safe. I have every piece in this sack—yes, sah. And when Ole Missis done come home, I jest have to say, 'Yes, Ma'am; yes, Miss Roxane, I done hide it safe till Mr. Sherman done gone on his way 'bout his business. I done hide it all in the hant oak in the grabeyaad.' "

Old Jason had now come to the mighty tree, towering portentously. Cautiously he slipped the sack from his shoulder until it rested softly on the ground. Leaving it there, he began to examine the hollow. It was at a convenient height above the ground, and the aperture was sufficiently large to admit the sack. Mastering his trepidation, Jason thrust his hand in; he could feel the bottom of the hollow. Though the thought had little to do with his errand, he reasoned that if the hollow were really the abode of a hant, the fearsome creature was not at home. Old Jason found the hollow dry, and the soft, rotten wood yielded to his touch. It seemed an ideal place in which his precious burden might repose. Jason turned, lifted the sack, slipped it into the hollow, and settled it

tenderly into its place. It rested well below the aperture; no one not actually looking into the hollow would see it; and there was no one left in that part of the country, save Old Jason himself, who would dare to look into that haunted place.

His task completed, the ancient negro made his way by another route out of the burying ground. At some distance from the oak he turned into a path, which led him at length to a road that skirted the cemetery. Jason reached this with a sigh of relief; for now if any one saw him, there could be no suspicion attached to his walking in an open, pineland road. On his old face was a glow of happiness as he turned in the direction of the plantation gateway. He would return now to the Great House, there to await whatever dangers might come, until the return of the family he had so faithfully served. But he felt, with thanksgiving in his heart, that his greatest danger was past, the possibility of the loss of the treasure entrusted to his keeping.

Old Jason had almost reached the gateway, beyond which the plantation home glimmered beneath its live oaks, when he was aware of soft foot-falls in the sandy roadway behind him. He turned quickly, to face two young

negroes. Jason knew them; they were from another plantation down the coast. And his first glance at them gave him the feeling that they were away from home for no good reason. This suspicion became certainty when the two newcomers spoke to him. They assumed an air of nonchalant friendliness that Old Jason knew to be feigned. He realized that they, like all others of their kind, were aware of his position of responsibility, and that therefore they would not follow him and stop him on the plantation road unless they had business with him. And what business save that of a sinister nature could these wanderers have with him? Yet Jason granted them guardedly the benefit of a huge doubt.

"You boys is a long way from home," he said gravely. "Is you gwine spend the night to the settlement?"

"Maybe," said the older man evasively, "but we got a little business on hand first, Uncle Jason."

Old Jason felt his heart begin to throb. Had they seen him emerge from the burying-ground? If so, could they have guessed his mission there? The two negroes drew up very close to the old plantation servitor. The

ancient régime was face to face with the new and the strange and the lawless.

"You say we is a long way from home," the younger negro said in an insinuating voice, "but we ain't got no home. You is free. We is free. And all that did belong to others, we can take it now, 'caze we is free."

Old Jason understood what was meant. This kind of talk, he dimly surmised, must be the fruit of war and of sudden emancipation. He experienced a feeling of anger that these two upstarts should attempt to try any new doctrines on him, especially such doctrines. He had been an autocrat too long to hear with any feeling but one of hatred and scorn the wild ideas of adjusted relationships that a too sudden and violent democracy brings abortively forth. Jason did not withhold his feelings.

"If you ain't got no home," he said, "that is because you won't work. And if you think anything on this Rivers place belongs to you," he added, with rising indignation, "you better change your mind. You is free," he went on with trenchant emphasis, "but you ain't free to steal."

With this Old Jason turned toward the gateway. He had no time to spend on such men

and he meant his actions to show it. But as he turned, the younger of the two negroes stepped quickly forward and placed himself between Jason and the gate. The older man moved up to close it on the old servant.

"Now, Uncle Jason," one said, "there ain't no hurry for you to go. Is you gwine kill yourself working for the white folks? 'Sides, we ain't done with this little business yet."

"What you want?" asked Jason abruptly and with resentful heat.

"We want what you done hide," said the older negro. "These white folks," he added depreciatingly, his eye falling before Jason's stern one, "ain't neber coming back nohow. We will neber see them no more."

"Where is you gwine that you will neber see them no more?" asked Old Jason with fine sarcasm. But the negroes were not in the least touched by this. They felt, perhaps, that they were abreast of the times, whereas Old Jason could never be brought to understand and to take advantage of new conditions. But they felt that he and what he stood for and what he had secreted in the woods were now in their power. By a concert of action they sidled up to the old negro, each one taking him by an arm.

"We ain't gwine to hurt you," said the younger in his whining voice, "but you is to lead us to where the white folks' valu'bles is. You know the way," he added, stepping forward down the road and bringing Old Jason with him.

There was a brief struggle. Jason freed his right arm and struck one of his assailants, who, with a sinister swiftness, whipped a heavy pistol from his bosom, clubbed it, and dealt the old negro a vicious blow on the back of the head. Jason's knees quavered. His eyes opened wide, then closed; his hands clenched convulsively. He sank to the ground and lay still.

"You done kill the ole grandpa," said the older negro. The two looked furtively about. Their eyes dwelt for a guilty moment on the unconscious Jason. Then silently, fearfully, they slunk off into the deep woods, leaving the Rivers' champion prone in the plantation road.

It was quite dark when Old Jason recovered consciousness. He was sadly bewildered, seeming to be able to recall nothing. All recollection of his late encounter had passed from him; he could not remember how he happened to be there in the twilight by the gateway. But he knew well enough who he was, and that his

post of duty was at the Great House. The nature of his fidelity was such that his first movement was in the direction of the Rivers home.

It was only after a long and bewildered struggle that Old Jason reached the house; and there he went to sleep in the small back room that had been apportioned to him. He lapsed into sleep's unconscious state without being aware that a deeper unconsciousness had come over his memory.

His awakening on the morrow was an awakening to his old duties; and he went about the house as usual, assiduously busy about the same tasks that had engaged his strength and his faithfulness every day for forty years.

During the days that succeeded, cheering news came from the west. The great army had passed northward, leaving the melancholy, blackened ruins of many stately homes, but passing untouched the Rivers plantation. Old Jason began to feel that it would be safe to have his henchmen bring from the swamp the hidden pieces of furniture. Indeed, he had fully made up his mind to it one day, when the sun shone brightly and peacefully, and when there seemed to be in the atmosphere no hint of the receding alarms of war. But as Jason was about

to start for the negro settlement to carry through his plan, he saw a carriage driving up through the avenue. His heart almost stopped beating for the moment, for he imagined it might be General Sherman himself, of whose personality Old Jason had conjured a fearsome image. But as it drew up to the steps, from it alighted Roxane Rivers, whom the old negro welcomed with an affectionate gladness that was ample proof of how he had kept the faith.

"I knew you would be here to meet me, Jason," she said, "you have never failed us. You are always at your post of duty. . . . No Roman soldier was ever more faithful," she added to herself as the loyal old servant with reverent pride bowed her into the house. "Is every one safe, Jason?" she asked.

"Yes, Ma'am; yes, Miss Roxane; and everything you give me to keep is same how you left him. We done heard the shootin' but nobody done come this side. I know, Ma'am, 'caze I been here all the time."

On entering the dining-room, the appraising eye of the mistress fell on the vacant spaces whence the massive pieces of furniture had been taken. Jason quickly explained. "I wuz gwine to have them brought back to-day," he

added, "when I done see your carriage comin' up the avenue."

Roxane Rivers was so eager to restore the order and the arrangement of the home that she despatched Old Jason immediately to the settlement to have the other negroes bring in the furniture. In an hour's time the order had been executed, and through the plantation gateway entered a strange procession. It looked like moving day, a funeral, and a returning picnic party all in one. And it was with amusement and astonishment and pride that Roxane Rivers viewed the approaching multitude. Her pride was due to the fact that some negroes, who had always been considered the most shiftless and unreliable, the very ones she might have expected to be into mischief, were now doing their share. She saw the crafty Tall Samson bearing, as if in triumph, the massy sideboard. And there was Jehu, laboring with the huge andirons. Tom and Tony, two former incorrigibles, were manfully bringing in the great divan belonging in the living-room. Along the fringes of the procession were little children, running excitedly and laughing at the efforts of their elders.

In due time all the furniture had been replaced; and then followed a dinner in the big

plantation kitchen for the workers. Only Old Jason was absent. He was reporting in detail on the things which had been taken from the house, checking off those that had been returned. At last Roxane Rivers asked him about the family silver and the gold tea service.

"Of course you looked after those yourself, Jason," she said. "I know you wouldn't have let any one else touch them."

Jason looked curiously puzzled, and he shook his gray head slowly. "No, Ma'am," he answered, "I didn't take the silber and the gole. The silber and the gole," he repeated musingly, "they must be in the closet, same how they always been."

Together they went to the closet door. There the ancient servitor produced the massive key, turned it in the lock, and held the door wide for the mistress of the plantation to enter. The sun was sloping westward, and certain dim beams of it shone palely into the dark recess. Roxane Rivers stepped forward and looked about. She had had no premonition that anything was wrong; her faith in Jason would never have permitted it. But her surprise swiftly became fear as she viewed the empty closet, felt vainly on the shelves, and

saw that even the silk cases were gone from their places along the wall.

"Why, Jason," she said, "there is nothing here."

The old negro shuffled forward, a look of incredulity on his face.

"Ain't here, Miss Roxane? But he must be here. I done shine him last week. I done—"

"But haven't you had the key all the time, Jason?"

"Miss Roxane," he answered, "you know I wouldn't 'low nobody to touch that key. No, sah," he added mutteringly, "that is my key, and I have it by me day and night."

"But the silver, and the beautiful service set—don't you know where they are, Jason? Surely you must have taken them out and hidden them in some safer place."

A strange light came into Old Jason's eyes. He seemed to be gazing upon a scene that was no longer visible. But then, not without a struggle on Jason's part to keep it alive, the light faded.

"I don't 'member," the old man said, brokenly, pitifully. "Miss Roxane, the gole and the silber been here, but I don't know where he is now. I don't 'member." And to all her queries, Old Jason had but one sad and

inconclusive rejoinder: "I don't 'member."

The days passed into weeks, and these weeks into months. Slowly the work of the plantation adjusted itself to the new and strange conditions. Few negroes had left the Rivers place, and those who did so were of a restless and uncertain sort. Though Roxane Rivers could not escape the haunting thought that Old Jason knew of the hiding place of the lost treasure, she ceased to question him on the matter, and she retained him in his high position of trust and honor. Indirectly, when the loss of the silver would be felt on those regular days when the old negro had been wont to clean it, the question of its fate arose. But always the pathetic "I don't 'member" closed the question.

The time approached when the men of the Rivers family turned their faces homeward; one, indeed, would not return; but his mother felt a solemn pride in the sacrifice which he had made of himself and that she made of him. Hers was a just pride, too, in the fact that the old plantation home would be ready to welcome the soldiers back. There was hardly a thing gone. Nearly all the negroes had been faithful. Old Jason—but there the haunting suspicion would return. If he had but kept

his trust, what a record of fidelity would she have to show her husband and her sons! Yet she could not convince herself that the old servant had betrayed that trust.

One day the mistress of the plantation went down to the gateway to tie the gate open. There was no stock to wander in and out, and she wanted the gate wide when her men returned, which might be at any hour of the day or night. It was late in the afternoon; and, her task accomplished, she stood looking back at the Great House, dreaming in its shelter of oaks. Suddenly down the road she saw Old Jason coming. He was going home to the settlement. As he came up he paused with his hat in his hand.

"We must keep looking for them, Jason," she said, "for we must be found watching when they come. They will be as glad to see you as if you were one of the family, Jason. How I wish," she added musingly, "that we had not lost the silver, and the gold tea service. . . ."

Old Jason looked back at the woods; then his gaze turned toward the house. His dim eyes welled with tears.

"Oh, Miss Roxane," he said tremulously, "if I could 'member,—if I only *could* 'member!"

A moment later he had passed on down the

lonely road, shaking his head and muttering.

Roxane Rivers turned back thoughtfully toward the house; but a sudden call from the dusky road down which Jason had disappeared arrested her steps. She paused to listen. She heard the cry repeated, and she knew it to be one for help. Though fully aware of the danger she might be facing, she hurried in the direction whence the cry had come.

In the shadowy road not far from the gateway she came in sight of two forms bending over some one prostrate in the road. On her approach these two rushed away into the darkening woods. The fear that guilt alone can give was upon them. But Old Jason lay as he had fallen. He was lying at a peculiar angle, and his body looked crumpled.

Kneeling beside him in the twilight road, Roxane Rivers spoke to him, chafed his rough old hands, laid her hand over his heart, to feel but a faint beating there. But her voice roused him. His eyes looked into hers; and the light therein was the peace that passeth understanding.

"Miss Roxane"—the words came feebly and slowly, yet with a great hushed gladness—"I done hide it in the hant oak. I done 'member now. Them men you see jest now, they done

fight me once before to make me tell them where I hide it. I 'member it all now. We been in a fight by the gate, and one hit me, here in my head, Miss Roxane, and I done forget everything. But this time, when they done jump on me at the same place, it all come back."

The old negro's eyes closed; his body seemed to relax. But Roxane Rivers heard faintly, as if from a voice in another land and life, "I 'member; I 'member."

By the haunted oak in the burying ground on the Rivers plantation is a grave surrounded by a little iron railing. And the brief inscription on the plain white stone is a part of the heritage of the Rivers family. It reads: "Jason: Faithful unto death." And to that humble grave generations yet unborn of the Rivers family shall go in reverence.

X

A MONARCH OF THE SKY

FROM the lonely shores of Cedar Island the tall palmettoes with the blasted tops gazed gauntly out to sea. The wind was eerie through the withered sedge, murmuring mysteriously over the black marsh-circled beach-pools. The red moon, hanging low above the heaving ocean, seemed lost in moody contemplation of the spectral scene that her own light enchanted. From the northeast and the southwest flashed the beacons of solitary light-houses, answering each other across the miles. To the east lay the lordly Atlantic. To the northward, fringing the Carolina coast to a depth of fifty miles, loomed, shadowy and vast, the great long-leaf pine forest. And through the scented woods and out into the spacious delta-country, moving in beauty and power by plantation, swamp, and wide ricefield, the great Santee River rolled on majestic toward the sunrise seas. And over the land and the water, bending its bow of beauty from horizon to horizon, the day-sky, with her light

and her colors and her joy; and the night-sky, with her stars and her splendor and her peace, —over the land and the water this sky was lovely. And the Monarch of the Sky above the stormy river-mouth was a great bald-eagle, noble, wise, and—hunted.

It was now well on toward daylight, and the eagle, lone on his roost in a shadowy pine on Cedar Island, awaited with the dignified patience that befits true royalty the coming of the light.

To him the day would bring his beautiful bright kingdom of the sky. It would bring him the fierce delight of swooping down upon his prey, and the rapture of a triumph over the wary mallards that flocked in the warm, marsh-sheltered ditches in the old abandoned rice-fields. It would bring him the calm joy of bathing in the blue sea of the air, sunning himself as he circled in the far sky. The day would lead him forth to conquer, to triumph, and to reign. But, ah me, it would never more lead him forth to companionship and love. It had been three years since London, the negro poacher and duck-hunter, had killed his mate; and since then the fierce old eagle had become solitary. Lone was the flight that bore him

above ricefield and river, lone was his outgoing and his homecoming; lone stood he on his perch in the ancient pine, the wise inscrutable monarch; and lonely was his stormy scream, haunting the remote solitudes of the coast. From day to day he beat his splendid way from ocean to cypress-swamp, far up the river, and back again, taking his fair toll of the rice-fed mallards. But by his side, neither in the bare and brooding winter, nor in the shimmering days of spring, nor in the crimson and the golden of the autumn was there to be found a companion for him. And the proud old heart beneath the tawny brown breast knew that for him love would never come again.

It is not well to be lonely, not even for an eagle; but to be lonely and fearful is terrible. Not that the Monarch of the Sky bore the heart of a coward; not so. But it was a heart that held its life and dominion by strategy as well as by strength; and it had been taught the bitterest lesson of its life by a negro with a gun. Five times had the white duckers shot at him, and one of them had driven a charge of shot under his wing, but the distance had been too great and the lead had not pierced him. Yet he had seen the dread London kill his beautiful mate; had heard the hollow re-

verberation of his musket, and had seen his companion, who was sailing at his side, shudder, crumple up sickly, and drop limply into the edge of the marsh. And the Monarch knew full well that the day he came within range of London's musket would be his last. It seemed shameful that so lordly a bird should live in fear, passing his days as it were with a price on his head. And always he was apprehensive; always, except when, lost in the light of the towering skies, he ranged beyond the vision of man and beyond his power.

Each morning the eagle left his roost with the sunrise, and now the sun was glowing just below the horizon. Over the crested seas of the glimmering inlet the long lances of light rose steadily. All the trees along the coast stood motionless in the rosy bath of dawn, and even the melancholy cedars, driven into agonized postures by fierce autumnal gales, took on a soft light of beautiful fading. And the se-date old Santee, shrouded in filmy mist, blushed beneath the sunlight as a bride beneath her veil. And when the sun cleared the ocean, the gaunt eagle launched himself forth upon the soft and fragrant sea of the heavens. The Monarch was once again the master of his beloved kingdom.

As he left the deep shadow of the dewy woods, his flight took an upward angle, so that when he came soaring out over the bare beaches, he was out of gunshot. His superb flight betrayed sadly by these and similar tactics that he was a confirmed fugitive.

The Monarch swept over Cedar Island beach, headed across the tawny inlet toward Ford's Point, raised a black cloud of mallards, sporting in the shallow water to leeward of the point, and then turned up the broad reaches of the Santee. Beneath him a tiny tug-boat pushed her way slowly out to the inlet for a tow. Beneath him, too, flock after flock of seaward-going ducks hurried, veering low when they made out the Monarch far above them. Off a high bluff where a creek split an island in the river, the eagle saw a flock of about sixty mallards, close in shore. His wings curved downward, and with the wind roaring behind him he dropped through the sky toward his prey. Yet long before he came within striking distance, his keen eyes caught the sight of twinkling barrels of steel in the marsh on the bluff, and a second sight at the ducks showed them to be decoys. The eagle towered in flight, changed his course, and came not near the earth again until he alighted on

the bleached and craggy top of a dead cypress, far up in the lonely Laurel Hill Swamp, ten miles from Cedar Island.

There the Monarch brooded over his ancient wrongs; over the loss of his mate, over his hunted life, brooding over these with a savage loneliness. Toward noon he foraged through Wampee Creek, that wound its silent and tortuous way far up into the heart of the swamp. But he did not find any wood-ducks there. The tide was low, and the day very calm. Doubtless they were in the ricefields far down the river. Once he struck fiercely at a mild bittern, ambushed in the muddy marsh, only to swerve away from the terrified, cowering object of his attack with regal scorn.

All day long he alternated between the dry cypress and the nearby creek, hoping to pick up a summer duck or a stray mallard. But the whole region seemed deserted, save for a few little pitiful happy song-birds, warbling in the mellow sunlight under the protection of friendly thickets.

Toward afternoon the Monarch, his hunger whetted by his fruitless toil and vigilance of the day, wheeled down from his sentinel post on the cypress, and directed his flight toward the river-mouth. As he passed over the spa-

cious fields in the delta, he flushed many mallards, and many more crouched beside reedy tussocks until he had passed. They knew well his ways, and they feared nothing in life so much as the sinister splendor of his presence. When his flight had brought him down the river as far as Cane Gap, an inlet from the sea opening into the Santee, and not more than three miles from Cedar Island, the eagle saw, riding on the lapping waves near the shore, four or five mallards. As he was flying over the marsh and not down the open river, he could approach them under cover of the tall reedy growth, sinking from sight until he rushed clear of the marsh, and was on his prey. So he swerved downward until his great brown body and his wide wings grazed the tremulous tops of the rank growths in the wild waste field. On, on the eagle sped, his powerful pinions driving him forward with matchless swiftness, his gaunt and proud old head outstretched in fiery eagerness, and his gripped talons aching for the fall. Over creek and shallow bay, over bush and cane-brake, his speed increasing every moment, the great monarch of the sky rushed down upon his prey.

Meanwhile, concealed in the heavy canes on the river-edge, scanning the water and the sky

for ducks, London the poacher sat facing his five battered decoys, his deadly musket across his knees. The sun was almost down, and the air would soon be alive with the evening flight, and he had fair hopes of luring a few gray mallards or black-ducks within range. He was crouched so low that he was practically invisible. He knew how to hide in a blind. But so far he had had no luck at all. He hadn't burnt powder once, and he had been on the stand an hour. His legs were cramped and cold, and his temper none the best. He felt like shooting any kind of a duck that came along. As the moments passed and the incoming flight of ducks from the sea began, London became more and more restless. One small flock drew to the stool, only to flare away out of gunshot. The negro cursed them sullenly. Then in a twinkling he heard a rush, a great form shadowed him, and the Monarch of the Sky, with wings arched and talons wide, shot over the edge of the blind and fell on his prey. He grappled one big drake-decoy, sinking his claws into the soft wood, and actually lifted him half out of the water. But even on the moment the old eagle knew his fatal mistake.

From the nearby marsh the fateful black

barrel of London's musket was thrust with cold-blooded deliberation.

"Dat ole rascal!" muttered the negro between his teeth.

At last the eagle had come within range of London's gun. And the poacher was going to shoot him, partly because he was angry and partly because eagles could be sold in the nearby village to a taxidermist. He leveled his musket, the heavy brass sight finding its mark against the eagle's brown breast. He was only forty yards away, and duckshot at that distance would be deadly. And, wise beyond the wisdom usually accorded the bird kingdom, the eagle realized his sickening peril.

To make it worse the eagle blundered as he released his intended victim, and his piercing eyes saw death looking him in the face. Perhaps through his brain flashed the remembrance of that far-off morning when his beautiful mate had dropped from her place at his side, a place that would ever be empty. With ponderous strokes he beat violently upward, while London's sight rested the more surely on his heart.

Suddenly, over the waters aglow with the colors of the sunset, straight for the decoys, two green-wing teal sped swiftly. Simple-hearted, unsuspecting, companionable little fel-

lows they were. In a moment London had seen them, and his gun-sight shifted away from the rising eagle. Two teal make a pair of ducks, a better bag than an eagle.

Up rose the great monarch, towering far and high. The frightened teal flared wide at sight of that dread black apparition. And London was left crouching, with his musket at his shoulder, in the cold marsh.

The Monarch of the Sky winged his way majestically through the twilight once more down to his home on Cedar Island. Far, far through the rosy afterglow the lone and splendid eagle pursued his lordly flight, until at last he was lost to the vision of man in the liberty of God's sky.

XI

THE DUEL IN CUMMINGS

COLONEL JOCELYN was not without honor as a prophet in his own country. This was, perhaps, due to the fact that the Colonel was prepared to back any speculation that he desired to make with the same personal interest that a question involving his personal honor would have occasioned; and his austerity on matters touching the Code was the pride of three counties. It was not surprising, therefore, that, in view of the deference accorded his insight into the future, his remark to the effect that Scipio Lightning would soon get the better of Wash Green should have been widely circulated in Cummings; and the good people of that community awaited the fulfilment of this prophecy with calm and flattering assurance.

Scipio and Wash—or, more properly, Scipio Lightning and George Washington Alexander Burnside Green, a vision of whose future had been granted Colonel Jocelyn—were negroes without visible means of support. For a long

time their livelihood had depended on the charity of Cummings; and that little seacoast village was wont to be indulgent toward those who were sufficiently picturesque to contribute to the gaiety of the public. Not infrequently the question of their arrest and imprisonment on various charges was raised; but the possibility of a Cummings without Scipio and Wash, guilty as they were, caused such a hum of disapproval that even the white-haired Justice of the Peace was forced to compromise his conscience in the broader interests of humanity; Scipio and Wash were permitted to remain at large.

Wash Green had the reputation of being a very wily negro; strange stories were told of his ingenuity and cunning. He was middle-aged, squat, and reverent looking. He wore glasses—not that his eyes were weak, but because they added to his sanctified air. With the same appealing force the innumerable patches in his raiment enhanced his piety. His broad face was benign and childlike, and the slyness of his furtive eyes might well have been interpreted as a sainted and bashful meekness. He never lost his equanimity; he could lie with a Scriptural accent and could steal chickens and watermelons benevolently. Occasionally he

made a little money by holding Doctor Bethune's horses; but his passionate aversion to work was the chief characteristic which marked him as Scipio's soul-mate.

Scipio was not wily, nor did he pretend to be. He was too tall and too strong and too simple-hearted to be treacherous. He was very typical of a certain class of negro; ebony, gaunt, smiling. His home for many years had been on one of the nearby rice plantations, and his heart was still there; however, because of domestic aberrations, he had taken temporary refuge in Cummings. Once since his coming he had actually worked a whole week without a break; and when a detractor sought to slander him his friends defended him on the score of this historic instance. Nothing in the world should worry a man of this nature; but one thing worried Scipio: Wash Green.

No two men are so suspicious of each other as two worthless men; and this feeling between Scipio and Wash, which had begun long years before, had finally deepened into a rivalry that had attracted all Cummings. Their feeling had passed beyond the point where an appeal to mere physical supremacy could settle it; it must needs be a mental duel, an intellectual fray; for the negro is not beneath appreciating

a keen thrust of thought and a fine parry of wit. The rivals were spurred on by all the loafers in Cummings, and there were times when a personal encounter seemed imminent; but the cunning of Wash always guided him safely past that rock, for he knew what Scipio could do along those lines. Wash, however, did not try to conceal the fact that he prided himself on his superior intellect and he took pains to have Scipio aware of the fact.

What really brought the matter to a test was the remark (since become historic in Cummings) made by Colonel Jocelyn that Scipio would soon get the better of Wash. This intelligence came to the rivals. It spurred on the one with serene confidence; the other felt that the hour to become famous had struck; for to be prophesied against was to be a blessed martyr, and Wash enjoyed being one; and then, if he could but frustrate the forecast of the great Colonel, all Cummings, even Scipio himself, would be bound to pay him tribute and honor.

A few days later Wash was invited to address the congregation of the little negro church in Cummings. In the light of his ability as a speaker, his moral turpitude had been overlooked. Bearing in mind the humiliating ef-

fect that any success of his would have on his rival, he prepared an elaborate sermon. He stood near the postoffice when the mail was being delivered, for it was at such a time that Doctor Bethune, Judge Wicklow, and Parson Benbow were wont to give the community the benefit of their professional learning in terms well suited to the needs of Wash. He remembered the longest and most rolling words of all, and these he treasured, rehearsed in secret, and longed for the hour of their delivery to come.

When the night arrived Wash was elated past belief. He ignored Scipio when he passed him on his way to church. His pride was not lessened by his entrance into the sanctuary or when he ascended the pulpit. He saw with satisfaction that there were thirty or more people in the congregation; and there, too, was Scipio, sitting near the door. Ah, thought Wash, if he could but shine in the eyes of that company, to the everlasting confounding of Scipio, when would his glory fade! Perhaps this very night would decide his fate for all time. He felt that the mantle of the Divine was upon his shoulders, and he accepted it with that respectful resignation which is the attitude of most wily men toward questions of a religious nature. But this resignation was only

assumed; inwardly he was burning with the beauty of the sermon that would utterly rout the pretensions of his rival.

After a few hymns had been sung, the time for the sermon came. Wash cleared his throat forensically and stood up. The Bible in his hand made the Animal in his face pathetic. He did not open the Book because he could not read.

"My brederen an' sister," he began, "I'se gwine to onrabble de great ponderation. I want to tell you 'bout dat gaaden w'ere Adam lib wid Ebe."

He paused to let his words take effect, not forgetting to look with serene and assured triumph at Scipio.

"E-eh, Lord," cried a shrill-voiced woman, "but dat nigger know dat Bible!"

Wash took this with becoming modesty, and Scipio shifted his seat uneasily. As long as his rival continued to preach well, Scipio's chances for fulfilling the prophecy were slight. Unlike Macaulay's Puritan, he was not deeply read in Biblical lore. He saw one way only of snatching victory from apparent defeat: if he could turn the laugh on Wash the duel would go to him. If he could put an innocent question that Wash could not answer a certain

amount of satisfaction would be his. He clung to these thoughts while his rival proceeded.

"Lemme tell you 'bout dis gaaden, an' 'bout Adam an' Ebe," he continued. "In dat same paradise dere been a tremenjous water-moccasin; an' dat same rep-tile was de ole debbil herself. One day he came out fo' sun heself on dat ribber edge; an' 'bout dat same time Ebe gone down to de ribber fo' fetch a bucket o' water. W'en she see dat outrageous varmint she jump up on de rail-fence an' whoop fo' Adam. But dat Adam been 'sleep; 'cause he been wuk in de cotton field' all mornin'. You know, my brederen an' sister', dat all we po' niggers must wuk. De day am long an de wuk am haad, an' we po' niggers must do dat wuk! Po' nigger!"

This adroit personal touch went to the hearts of his congregation. They were moved. They rocked and swayed on their seats with bowed heads, moaning softly and repeating, "Po' nigger!" Even Scipio felt the warm tears gather as the words of Wash took him back to the days (happily past) when he himself had labored.

"I speck," continued the preacher, unconsciously presenting his admiration for slyness, "dat Adam hyeard dat whoopin'; but Adam

done see dat snake heself, an' he don't want to fool wid him. So he jes' lie on dat bench in de sun an' listen how Ebe she whoop."

Alas for the sermon elaborately prepared! Alas for the cunning of Wash! Scipio perceived a rift in his rival's argument. He scented treason in the attitude of Adam. While Wash mopped his forehead ponderously, catching his second wind, Scipio stood up in the back of the church, making enough noise with the shuffling of his feet to attract attention. He held all eyes. Wash felt faint. His rival looked very tall and confident.

"My frien'," he said with a touch of righteous anger in his voice, "w'at kind ob a nigger you call dat Adam anyhow? W'at kind of a decent nigger will let one outrageous rep-tile sca-a-re he wife? Answer me dat!"

All the members of the congregation nodded their heads in approval of his words and muttered their approbation. Wash mopped his face feverishly. Dimly he began to see the issue: Scipio was attacking the personal character of Adam, while he had held it up for admiration.

"My frien'," continued the inexorable Scipio, "lemme ax you one mo' ponderation: w'at Adam an' Ebe, w'at dem triflin' niggers been

doin' in dat w'ite man gaaden anyhow? Bro' Wash, answer me dat!"

Wash Green cleared his throat for a reply, but the congregation refused him the attempt. The high-voiced woman began to croon a song in a minor key and soon they all joined in the farewell chorus. The duel was over; Scipio had won.

The next day Cummings knew the details of the duel, and every one congratulated Colonel Jocelyn on his prophetic power of vision. And the Colonel accepted these tributes with due modesty, as befitting one whose code of honor was austere.

XII

AT LOW TIDE

THE sea-wind over the marshes was warm and fragrant. The harvest moon was rising and the night-mists broke in silent foam, letting the moon's dimly iridescent rays pierce through them to shine palely on the water beneath. The surf fell sleepily on the drowsy shore. Far back in the pine woods behind the marshes two horned owls were answering each other with wonderful soft voices. In the creeks where the dull foam of the ebb glimmered, fish of all kinds broke water, hunted or were hunted. One by one, as the tide receded, the gleaming black oyster banks came out on the shores below the marsh line. Here and there where a small creek emptied into a larger, or where there was a sharp bend, the ebb-tide eddies, full of floating sedge and cloudy foam, whirled softly in the moonlight. There seemed to be life astir everywhere—the life which awoke with the ebb and flourished by virtue of its withdrawal: there were sharks sliding wickedly along the

shores; there were herons standing like specters over ebbing creeks; there were shear-waters and willets and night hawks; on a steep muddy bank two otters were playing; through the high marsh and thick sedge a whole family of minks scuttled, glided and ran. Now and then a clapper-rail, disturbed by some marauder or made sentimental by the moonlight, rose and flew a few rods with dangling legs. Occasionally a tiny exquisite marsh sparrow would flit with gay independence over a narrow creek. The marsh and the water and the air were alive. The sea called to the marsh and tide, and the marsh sighed to the pine woods, which answered melodiously. The marsh called to the pine woods, and especially to a certain raccoon which all day long had slept in a blanket of Spanish moss in the high fork of a huge black-gum tree that stood on the edge of the forest near the beach. The night before he had foraged in the swamp and in the nearby corn field, but this night—with the tide going out, and the moon so bright, and the marshes whispering to him—how could he resist the oyster bank that lay so alluringly across the first stretch of marsh, and all the glorious side chances of catching a few fish in the shallow creeks?

He could not resist. He yawned, stretched

his legs, and, climbing high enough to clear the moss, he began to back slowly down the tree. He was an old raccoon and very wary. Every ten feet or so he would stop backing and hang breathless, listening for any noises that might send him scurrying back to his perch, there to crouch in watchful silence until the trouble and every vestige of the shadow of it had passed. But there were no such sounds. The marsh only seemed to call the more insistently to the dark pines, and the raccoon, gaining the ground at length, paced off under the low, gnarled red cedars and scrub oaks. He struck a hog path on the edge of the high sedge and racked swiftly through it, coming out on the thin strip of beach that bordered the marsh. Before him the wide marshes were softly illumined by the moonlight. He picked his way through the mud with its spear-marsh growth, crossed a little trickling brackish stream that came out of the pine woods, and began to nose his way through an old, half-overgrown, water-sodden runway that led to the marsh. As he approached the edge of the wide creek the exquisite scents became more and more tempting. He racked faster: once he might have caught a mullet in a little drain, but in his haste to reach the oysters he forgot some of his stealth

and cunning. He hurried on, coming soon to a small hummock that lay directly in his path. Ordinarily he would have avoided it, choosing to go around the high ground rather than pass under the low bushes, whose heavy, bitter foliage might hide untold danger. But he was in a great hurry this time, for the succulent, savory oysters were almost within sight. He ran up the sandy mud on the little incline and took the first mink path through the bushes. He knew that when he reached the other side of the hummock the oyster bed would lie before him. But he never reached the other side of the hummock. Without warning of odor, of trembling bush, of bated breathing, without instinct of danger, there was a sharp click, cruel, terrifying, and the raccoon's foreleg was fast in the jaws of a steel trap.

Scipio had set it there on the low tide that morning, paddling all the way down the river to put the trap out in the marsh; but he had not set for a coon; he knew of easier ways to catch them; he was after the old white-nosed otter that for years had balked all his efforts to take him. Yet Scipio would not at all mind finding a big corn-fed coon in his trap. He would have liked it almost as much as the raccoon hated being there.

With the first swift, blinding clench of the steel jaws he leapt up and back, snarling and gazing fiercely about for his assailant. He tugged wildly at his leg, numbed by the deep pain of a broken bone, and bit and clawed at the trap. He pulled from every angle, limping about on three legs, whining piteously, and glancing up and down the path, fearing some new form of attack and not understanding why his enemy did not strike him again. But no further blow came. He paused in his struggle and listened cunningly. The wind sighed through the low bushes, the surf rushed and fell softly on the distant front beach, the fish in the creeks leapt and played, hunted or were hunted, the yellow glory of the moon streamed down on the wide marsh.

The raccoon sat down on his haunches and whined. He thought of the one place where he longed to be—safe in the high fork of the big black-gum tree. Once more he snarled and tugged fiercely. He listened again, but heard only the plaintive wind and the warm lapping of the waves and the fish breaking water. It was past midnight. He must get back to the big tree before daylight; he never hunted after 4 o'clock. The pain in the broken

leg was getting worse. He must get away; but how? In a little while the flood would be in and he would have to swim for shore. He had never swum but once, and that was because he had been cut off. And he loathed it heartily; it took too long for his heavy coat to dry. But if he could get away from the demon which was gnawing his leg off he would swim and gladly.

For the first time he examined cautiously and curiously the monster which held him. In reality it was only a small steel trap with teeth, fastened by a dog chain to one of the larger bushes; but to the raccoon in its grasp it seemed like a huge relentless monster of the ghostly night and of the mysterious marsh. He smelt about the trap, detecting for the first time the faint dread odor of the human hand and the tang of the rusting steel. His nose brushed against the part of his leg which dangled from the trap and he jerked back fearfully, thinking that it belonged to some other creature. Then he examined it again, and saw that it was his own leg and that it was useless. The faces of the trap had closed just above the knee. The bone there was crushed and splintered and the skin and flesh were badly torn by the cold grip of the teeth. Once more the

raccoon pulled back, though it gave him agony to do so, to be sure that he was held in that one place only. Then, with a strange light in his eyes and a look of ancient wisdom on his face, he sat down close to the trap and began to lick away the fur from that part of his leg just above the steel jaws. When the circle was complete and the place bare he sank his teeth into the flesh. His own warm blood flowed over his teeth and into his mouth. He gulped it down as a child gulps down its tears. Soon he had all the flesh cut; beneath were only the shattered bones and a few tendons. Stretching the tendons gently, he gnawed through them. The leg gave suddenly, and he nearly fell over. He was free!

But he did not move; he did not bound foolishly away as a mollie-cottontail would have done. Still holding the wounded leg up, he licked away the blood from the stump and pulled out carefully with his teeth a few splinters of bone. Then he eased himself down on three legs and ambled off painfully, leaving a wide trail of blood.

The flood tide was coming in apace. In several small creeks the water rose over the raccoon's knees. The salt burnt his wound cruelly. At last he passed through the marsh,

crossed the strip of beach, and finally came to the foot of the big gum tree.

Rearing himself on his hind legs he struck the claws of his foreleg into the soft bark and pulled himself up. Then he took hold of the bark with his teeth until he could shift his footing higher. Inch by weary inch he toiled upward until, just as the telltale light began to come in the east, and just as the moon sank over the sea, he dropped into the thick moss in the high fork of the black-gum tree. He lay very still; exhausted, but safe. Once he turned his eyes toward the marsh and saw, in the mist of the morning, the solitary figure of a negro, stalking about on the hummock. But the tide had covered the trail of blood.

Where the sea wind calls to the marsh, blowing forever with sounds of the sea and of the waves, there is a certain marsh, a certain pinewood, a certain hummock. And the wariest of all creatures there is an old raccoon with his right foreleg cut off above the knee. The wound has long since healed, and he forages regularly in swamp, in field, and in marsh. But he never again crosses a hummock. And he is never quite at his ease unless he is lying in the warm bed of Spanish moss in the high fork of the big black-gum tree.

XIII

THE STRATEGY OF GALBOA

GALBOA was by far the oldest of all the negroes in the Santee country. He was in "the white winter of his age"; and to his ancient and venerable aspect was added a dignity and a sense of superhuman understanding which demanded the tribute of awe.

Galboa lived alone on the Eldorado. His cabin was the one nearest the plantation graveyard. Indeed, none but he would have taken up his abode in dread proximity to that mysterious, gloomy cemetery. About it were the wastes of a melancholy yellow sedgefield. All the negroes suspected, and many firmly believed, that out of the graveyard came fearful specters which were boon companions of old Galboa.

Before his solitary little cabin were two stunted live-oaks, haunted by shrikes and mocking-birds. Built of rough pine logs, the cracks between which were more or less effectively stopped by pinestraw, bunches of grass, and bits of broken shingles, the cabin was hardly

a protection. The chimney was built of slate and clay; but the hand which had shaped it had only carried it halfway up the end of the cabin, so that all the logs above it were scorched and blackened. Behind the cabin were the last inland reaches of the long Eldorado ricefield.

Galboa was to the negroes of the plantation what Mage Merlin must have been to the old Celts. He looked the personification of wisdom. He was tall and spare, with powerful shoulders that his great age had not bowed; long, muscle-knotted arms, and large, strong hands. A heavy growth of white hair covered his head, and a long beard fell over his throat and breast. His manner, too, was venerable.

Galboa's character was like his appearance; and Ned Alston could trust him when he could trust no other negro on the plantation. Not that most of them were dishonest; but rather that, if put to a severe test, they would generally give way to fear or to excitement. But Galboa could be counted upon "night and day," as the planter used to put it. That was why, when Alston went into the diamond-back terrapin business, he chose Galboa to mind the cooter-pen.

This was the stockade in which the terrapin

were kept until the height of the market should warrant their sale. It is like a huge wooden crate, set in an estuary, where the salt tide will flush it twice a day. Alston had his cooter-pen several miles down the river from Eldorado, in a little bay that made in from Alligator Creek.

A cooter-pen must have a good watchman, and this watchman must be of a peculiarly sober and temperate disposition. He must be willing to stay by his post day and night; and, since a cooter-pen is generally located far from habitations, he must not mind living apart from his fellows in a lonely, out-of-the-way place.

For such a position, old Galboa was admirably fitted. He was on good terms with loneliness and to him it would be no discomfort to be awake most of the night. Indeed, many Eldorado negroes believed that Galboa never slept at all. Then, Galboa would not be afraid of the marauders who would almost certainly visit the cooter-pen; for diamond-backs are valuable, and since it would be difficult to identify them as stolen goods, they can readily be disposed of.

So Galboa, at Alston's request, left his cabin

on the plantation and took up his abode in a shack on the bank of Alligator Creek. The planter supplied his watchman with a musket; and, to repair instantly any damage that prowlers might make, he also let him have a hatchet and a box of nails. Like most negroes, especially old ones, Galboa was secretive; and these implements he kept in a dry place under one of the joists of his shack.

It was a hot night in August, and Galboa, who thought that the rising moon would carry on efficiently the watch he had begun, was dozing as soundly as the mosquitoes would permit. But in his sleep he heard the sound of a bump under his floor. He sat up on his rude cot and listened, but there came no further noise. Galboa kept two half-starved pigs; and as these often slept under his shack, he attributed the momentary noise to their restlessness. Outside, through the tiny window toward the coast, the old man could see by the moonlight the dark cedars, the incoming tide, and the shadowy green marsh through which the flood was stealing. On the shelving shore, gray curlews and little sandpipers were running, or standing and bobbing up and down after their quaint fashion.

Galboa watched these familiar sights while he listened. After a few minutes, the intense stillness was suddenly and sharply broken by a peculiarly shrill sound, such as a nail gives when it is being drawn out of a tough, wet board. Galboa got up quickly and quietly, took hold of his musket, and went to the window. Plainly in the moonlight he saw two dark figures at work down at the cooter-pen. They were bending over, as if wrenching off boards.

The watchman knew well enough what they were after, and the amount of damage they might do. Ned Alston had more than a thousand dollars' worth of diamond-backs in the pen; and some of the best of these the men might steal. If they left a board off, the whole penful might escape. Such a thing had been done before.

"You, dar!" shouted Galboa, and his shout was followed by the heavy report of the old musket. The men crouched low and scuttled away over the sandy beach, and were soon hidden in the woods beyond.

Mumbling to himself, Galboa came out into the moonlight; then, fumbling under the joists, he sought in the darkness for his hammer and nails. They were gone.

"Dey done steal my 'couterments, too," was Galboa's comment. "And now dey is gwine try to larcenify Mas' Ned's terrapin."

He crossed the beach and came to where the men had been working. He found, upon inspecting the damage, that they had done no great harm. The end of one board had been loosened; but this Galboa nailed into place with a brick that he found near the pen. Then he looked about for the hatchet and nails, but he could find neither.

"Dat is a tarrigation fo' sho," he said to himself. "Dey done steal my driver and my pinions, too. Well," he added with finality, "dey won't get these terrapin, dat's sho."

With a last look about him, old Galboa made his way slowly back to his cabin. The first thing he did was to reload his musket; and for the benefit of any who might be interested spectators of the proceeding, he did this in the full moonlight before his cabin. And he not only added some extra powder and shot, but for some time he stood there drawing imaginary sights on all objects in view. He felt that his movements were being watched, and he wanted to show that he was eager for another encounter. At length he stepped into his shack for the precious box of percussion caps

that he always kept on a shelf above the bare table on which he ate his meals. But for the metal box in its familiar place, old Galboa felt in vain. His gnarled hand fumbled along the rough board, but encountered nothing more than an ancient black bottle containing liniment for his rheumatism. Without caps, his musket was useless; and without his musket in a condition of efficiency, Galboa was helpless.

Slowly to his awakening wits came the possibility of what had been done: the men who were trying to rob the pen must be friends, who, on visits to the cabin, had learned where he kept the caps. They also had, in some way, discovered the hiding-place of the hatchet and nails. Galboa knew that the caps had been in place before he had dozed off. He now felt almost certain that while he had been repairing the pen, the marauders had slipped around through the woods to his cabin, then, under cover of the adjacent myrtle thickets, had made off with the box of caps. It meant that they had put Galboa's only weapon out of use. It also meant that the men were not through with their night's work.

The old man scratched his head and thought deeply. He was too far away to hope for help from Ned Alston or any one else. It was night

on one of the loneliest stretches of a lonely coast.

"I know," said the negro at length, as if trying sincerely to set in array the hard facts that he had to face, "dat somebody is gwine to steal dem cooter to-night. I is here to guard 'em. Dey must kill me," he added gravely to himself, "befo' dey get Mas' Ned's terrapin."

Then a new thought came to Galboa's mind.

"I wonder, now," he asked himself, "if dem two boys, Halfhand and Nuttin," speaking of his two worthless grandchildren, whose mother, chagrined at their unprepossessing appearance when they were born, had named them Halfhand and Nothing, "ain't jest trying to scare me? It might be," he added, but the hope in his head that this was the true purpose of his midnight visitors was faint indeed. Yet he determined to proceed on that understanding of the matter.

"Jest wait," he said softly; "dey don't know ole Galboa; no, sah, dey don't."

With endless memories thronging upon him of the failings of his two lazy and mischievous grandchildren, who were now grown men, Galboa began his preparations for the encounter. He brought in the musket which had been leaning against the door-beam. Then he pulled

from under his cot a spacious box, in which he had an extraordinary assortment of objects. One of these was a full-sized scarecrow, that Galboa had used earlier in the summer to keep away the crows and grackles from the little corn patch which he had tried to cultivate. He chuckled to himself as he brought forth this object. Sitting on the edge of the cot, Galboa began to make the figure look like himself; and, to tell the truth, this was no difficult task. He stretched his coat on its stiff arms, bending them down against its straw sides. He put his battered hat on its head. Then, placing a box on top of his wooden bench, he set the scarecrow on it, and then drew the whole machination over to the window. And there sat old Galboa, solemn and watchful, looking protectingly down on the pen of terrapins.

But his work was only half done. At the bottom of the box, carefully wrapped in newspaper, Galboa kept a cherished pair of sheets. Long before, a planter's kind-hearted wife, pitying the old negro's desolate quarters, had given him the rather odd present. But Galboa had always considered them far too precious to use, save, perhaps, in the event of his own funeral.

One of these sheets he now took out and,

tucking it under his arm, he stole stealthily out of the shack, going by way of the back door, that exit being shielded by a heavy growth of myrtle bushes from the view of those who might be at the cooter-pen or beyond it.

Behind these myrtles Galboa stood quietly until, as he had expected, he saw two shadowy figures emerge from the woods across the marsh-flats. Then Galboa took a wide circle through the dark paths under the beach-cedars. At last he came to the edge of the woods opposite his cabin; and from that point he saw, with pleasurable satisfaction, his own watchful countenance looking out of his window.

"It sho' do look like me," said Galboa, nodding his head with approval.

From his place of concealment, Galboa could see the men down at the cooter-pen, a hundred yards away. They were talking as they pried and worked with the wet boards that were difficult to start because the wood had swelled about the nails. In his clump of dense myrtles, Galboa shook out his sheet and put it over his head. Then, having torn two small eyeholes, he was ready for the encounter.

Through the tall sedge-grass and over the smooth beach in the moonlight he advanced silently. Truly he made a fearsome specter,

his great height enhancing the grim and ghostly effect of his presence. There he stood, tall and silent: not the Headless Horseman or the Ghost of Hamlet's father could have been more awe-inspiring.

The two men, busily at work under the shadow of the cooter-pen, did not see the weird figure. Indeed, they had no fear of any one approaching from that direction. They were much employed with their task; and as they pulled and pushed and strained with the boards, they took gleeful occasion to comment on the character and attainments of their grandfather, Galboa. They were not only there to steal, but also to make an old and infirm relative miserable.

"Look at dat ole owl a-settin' up in dat window," said Halfhand. "Since he can't find dem gun-caps, he is afeared to come out."

"Dat ole grandpa is skeered of us," said Nothing, with a chuckle. "Dat ole thing am no account to watch a cooter-pen. Some o' dese nights a Hiddle Diddle Dee is gwine to fly away with 'im."

Once more they indulged in chuckles at Galboa's expense. But they had unaware given Galboa the cue for his next move. They had mentioned the Hiddle Diddle Dee. And of

all weird spirits that haunt the woods and fields at night, the negroes fear most the great horned owl, which they call by that strange appellation. In this name they gather all those freezing horrors that are found in darkness, in solitude, and in lonely woodlands, in spectral fields, and in forbidding swamps.

And now, from a point not far behind the two negroes, there floated out on the still night air the soft and melancholy notes of a great horned owl: "toot-a-loot, toot-a-loot, toot."

"Wah dat?" ejaculated Halfhand and Nothing in a breath, unconsciously huddling together. Again the weird notes sounded, and the culprits turned toward where the tall, white specter stood.

For a moment they were speechless with terror. Nothing could be more imposing than Galboa as a ghost. Soon the fears of the two wretched men became articulate. Dropping their tools, they went down on their knees in the mud, groveling and praying to the sinister figure.

"O do, Pastor!" pleaded one passionately, "we didn't mean no wrong! We will never worry old Galboa no mo'! O do please, Bossman! We wouldn't bother Mas' Ned's terrapin again. Oh!"

The only answer that the specter vouchsafed was a peculiarly remote, haunting, and melancholy, "toot-a-loot, toot-a-loot, toot."

At that terrifying answer, the negroes broke and fled. One dropped his hat, but he gave it no thought. They screamed and waved their arms as they ran, following the line of the beach as it wound away toward the salt marshes. Far down the moonlit track old Galboa watched them go. Then he took off the sheet, folded it carefully, put it under his arm, and walked down to the cooter-pen. There he repaired the slight damage that had been wrought. After some searching, he found the hatchet and the box of percussion caps.

Galboa returned to his shack highly satisfied, for he knew he would have no more visitors that night.

Two days later he had a visit from Half-hand and Nothing. After a good deal of desultory talk, one of them approached the subject that was haunting him.

"Pa Galboa," he asked, "ain't you afraid to stay in dis 'ere lonesome place all by yo'self?"

With deep, inscrutable eyes old Galboa looked out across the beach.

"Why should I be 'fraid?" he asked speculatively in his quiet voice. "I neber do nobody

no wrong. I don't lie, and I don't steal."

"But ain't you skeered o' dem Hiddle Diddle Dee?" broke in Nothing excitedly.

"They and I are friends," responded Galboa thoughtfully. "And sometimes," he added significantly, "they come down out o' yonder woods and help me guard this cooter-pen."

Soon after, when Halfhand and Nothing took their departure, it was near twilight. And as they passed along the lonely beach, they quickened their pace, and cast many a furtive look behind.

Galboa and Ned Alston have had many a hearty laugh over Galboa's strategy; and they are the only ones who understand why neither Halfhand or Nothing can be induced to leave his cabin after dark.

XIV

THE ROMNEY SPECTER

ROMNEY, the rice plantation on the Santee River just below old Colonel Jocelyn's estate, had been deserted for many years. The family which had originally owned it had died out; and the distant relatives who inherited the place had never visited it, and did not seem to care for the fine old home or the broad acres surrounding it. The inevitable followed. In a few years Romney was little more than a picturesque ruin. There were the wide upland fields, overgrown with broomgrass and scrub-pines; there was the stately avenue of magnolias which led from the silence of the great pine forest to the silence of the desolate home. The giant live-oaks surrounding the house, shrouded in gray moss that sighed in the wind, seemed fit sentinels to watch for those who would come no more. The long piazzas had fallen in, and the haggard windows looked wild. In the forsaken garden a lone and lovely red rose completed the ruin of the place. By day a white sun-

shiny silence drenched the scene; by night Romney became the home of prowlers, going abroad under the stars to seek their meat from God.

The ruins were not old enough to deserve study, yet sufficiently old to inspire wonder and awe. No fire or storm had dismantled the house, only the long years of disuse and desertion had crumbled it and had given its gray walls to decay. The weeds and the low bushes grew up to the very doors (the lonely open doors!), and tall grass waved out of the stained cracks in the marble steps. Some sweet shrubs thrust their brown arms through the vacant window frames, as if appealing in behalf of the forlorn old home. The roof had fallen in places, giving a glimpse of molding walls and rotting beams. Indeed, Romney House was a most unhappy sight, and one which the people of that isolated region avoided whenever possible.

So Romney was deserted. But there were those who hinted darkly that the whole estate was steeped in mystery, and that its loneliness was kept inviolate by a Presence that was neither animal nor human. There were many who believed, and who were not ashamed to let their fears be known, that it was not safe to

pass Romney House by night. If asked the cause of their fear they would only shake their heads as if unwilling to commit themselves on a matter involving the supernatural. Still, as the road leading by the danger-point joined two thriving rice plantations, there were of necessity many who dared to take the risk. But as time passed, what had seemed at first to be but rumor and superstitious fear, began to take on more serious proportions. Old and respectable negroes, whose courage could not be doubted, told soberly of a shadowy form that had been seen standing in the tall gray grass near the ruined house; and one had seen it by moonlight in the open road,—a spectral shape that melted out of sight at his approach. The burden of most of the stories was to the effect that the Specter seldom moved; it stood, shielded by the high grass, and watched the intruder. In no case had any one approached it purposely. The Specter gave no chase, uttered no sound, made no movement; it merely watched silently from its semi-concealment. And those who thought that they had seen it said that its eyes were still, awful, and malignant, like the eyes of an evil spirit.

One night, a negro who was a stranger in that region and who did not, therefore, know

of the Romney Specter, came upon the old house when he was very weary and lay down upon the rotting porch to rest. There he fell asleep. An approaching thunder-storm awakened him, and he stepped off the piazza toward one of the great oaks. There would be little shelter afforded by the house, for the wild and threatening sky was darkly visible through the rents in the fallen roof. Rounding the corner of the house suddenly, he was overpowered by a sickening odor, and a huge form rushed past him, tripped him, and slashing him with some weapon disastrously sharp, plunged on under cover of the night and the gathering storm.

When the unfortunate negro told his incredible story and showed his cruel wound at the plantation settlement next morning, many of his listeners, while fascinated by the mystery, disbelieved him. Yet some were prevailed upon to visit the place; and there, as the Specter's victim said there would be, were blood and the signs of a bitter struggle. But there were no tracks visible in the tall grass; in fact no one searched minutely; for spirits are not known to leave trails.

This incident started the old rumors anew, and soon the story of the malignant Specter of Romney spread over half of the county.

But no organized search was made for the monster. Once a white hunter from one of the nearby swamps passed through Romney on a quail hunt. At dusk he came unexpectedly upon the great moldering house in its silent grove of gigantic oaks. He walked around the melancholy structure, thinking that he might get a shot at a barred-owl, for they haunt such places. Suddenly, from the other side of the house, he heard his setter give a startled bark, and then a pitiful yelp. Running in the direction of the sound, he almost fell over his poor dog that was lying in a little open space. The man stooped down and examined the unfortunate creature. There was a ghastly wound in its throat and another in its side, either one fatal. Rising, the man looked about him; and from the tall yellow grass near the yawning black door of the cellar, he fancied that he saw a gray and ghostly shape gazing at him steadily. Now, the hunter was a very young man; also—for the truth must be told—he was a coward. With one frightened glance at the murdered setter, and another at the dread Specter that he saw there, or that he fancied he saw there, he broke away and fled from that sinister old ruin.

Of course this story was soon abroad; but as

no one gave it credence except the negroes, and as they did not care about investigating, it only served to swell the rumors concerning the Specter and to give them a more fatal tinge.

But a month after the hunter's adventure, there occurred the only real tragedy that that quiet old plantation region had known in a generation. Two little negroes from Colonel Jocelyn's place had been down the river to take some provisions to their father who was working on ricefield trunk-docks. The elder was a girl of ten and the younger a boy of five. As they came by Romney House late in the afternoon, they were very tired. To them the Specter had assumed no very definite aspect or location. They had heard of it, of course; but they feared it in any dark or lonely place. The late afternoon sun fell with soft silver light on the ruin, and the place did not look haunted. So the children rested there awhile. Then a playful mood overtook them, and they began to play little games, hiding behind the big oaks and chasing each other around the angles of the house. Once the little boy stumbled against the rotted doorway of the cellar and fell across the black aperture. In a second a great gaunt form rushed upward,

tossed the boy high, and sped swiftly into the rank grass. The sister had but time to catch a fleeting glimpse of the Specter, and even so she was not sure that she had seen anything; for it was dusk, and her shocked eyes had been on her brother. When she brought him home in her arms, toiling through the dark, she was stupefied and speechless from fright and exhaustion. Her story was incoherent; but there was that which was dreadfully plain: there on the dead body of the little negro were the same cruel wounds that the Romney Specter was known to give. Then, indeed, did the sad story flash from plantation to plantation, and the name of Romney was on every lip.

Now, there was at least one negro along the river who had no fear of any Specter, whatever that might be. He was the hunter Scipio. He was a tall and powerful specimen of the black man, and, in spite of his marauding practices, was a general favorite among all the plantation-owners. The stories that had come to him up to this time of the so-called Romney Specter had not interested him. He was a hardworking negro, and he had no spare time to frighten himself. He had no leisure to spend on speculating about ghosts. All that he knew or cared to know about Romney was

that he had long since caught the best raccoons there, and that it was a poor place for the kind of game that he wanted. This indifferent attitude continued until the little boy lost his life. But at the occurrence of this unhappy incident Scipio awoke to the possibilities of Romney. Doubtless, he thought, some one would now put a bounty on the Specter. And in this he was not mistaken; for, ill as the poor old gentleman could afford it, Colonel Jocelyn, the morning after the tragedy, offered a reward of ten dollars to the man who would bring to him the Romney Specter, dead or alive. Such a price was more than Scipio would get for a dozen 'coon skins; and he seemed to be the only man eager to take the chances that the solution of such a problem was sure to occasion.

Scipio's unconcern over the matter of his own personal safety showed itself in the alacrity with which he made preparations to meet the Specter. At noon on the day when the bounty was offered, he washed out his old musket and loaded it carefully. Twenty double-sized buck-shot did he ram on top of the four drams of coarse black powder, and the nipple he primed with great exactness and deliberation. Scipio did not know what he might have to face; and the more he thought of it, the more he won-

dered. He thought that it must be a wild-cat, and a very large and treacherous one at that. Yet the wounds on the two negroes had been very long and deep. Scipio could not tell; so he took no chances.

Before sunset he took his stand at Romney House. The Specter had been reported seen only at twilight and after, and in the night Scipio was determined to meet him. He was so used to hunting at all hours that he did not mind the darkness; but he debated a long while as to where he should stand. He wanted to be off the ground, and he wanted to watch the shattered piazza and the gloomy cellar-door. The Specter would be reasonably sure to prowl near one of those places. If he sat in the low fork of the nearest live-oak, he would not be able to see the piazza distinctly; and if he had occasion to use his musket he would have to shoot through the foliage at the end of the limb. If he sat on the porch itself he might be taken unaware, and in a crisis there are few things worse than that. He did not know but that the sinister creature might drop on him from the disastrous roof. There was but one real chance,—to hide himself in the tall broom-grass in front of the cellar-door and there await the coming of the Specter.

Trampling a little space in the broomgrass, leaving a thin fringe in front of him, beyond which, twenty feet away, were the ruined porch and the haunted cellar-door, Scipio made himself comfortable—as much so as was possible under the conditions. But he was far more at his ease than most men would have been. And he was ready; for he was always ready when, as now, his musket lay cocked across his knees.

The winter's twilight came softly and with a gentle presence that pervaded all things. There were those vague sounds which attend the going to sleep of one half of the world and the awakening of the other. Over the river, a few hundred yards behind Scipio, a string of mallards bent and turned in their beautiful swift flight up to some favorite field. The white-breasted sparrows called with shrill urchin insistence from their dense green castles of smilax that crested the cassina trees. The barred-owls in the nearby oaks and in the giant cypresses along the river began their garrulous hooting and screaming. A sly raccoon paced stealthily down the path by Scipio, his nose twitching and his ears alert. A cotton-tail rabbit ran out into the pathway, sat on his haunches, washed his face with his paws, cut

a few ghostly capers, and then scampered silently away. A gray fox barked once from the old negro burying-ground, his harsh and menacing voice rasping on the gentle night. Then came the deeper darkness; and with it came silence, and the velvet swoons and trances of the stars.

Scipio glanced down his musket-barrel and saw there the friendly gleam of the brass sight. That was the sign of light sufficient to enable him to shoot with accuracy. He hoped that the night-mist would not rise and that the dark wall of clouds to the southwest would stay there. He trusted himself not to fall asleep. He felt that this was nothing like hunting 'coons, like waiting in a thicket for a deer, or like stalking a roasted turkey after night. Not even Scipio knew just what it would be like. He wanted to take off the percussion cap and examine the priming of his musket; but he was afraid to do so. The Specter might even now be watching him, he thought. So he just gripped his gun the tighter and waited quietly.

He had been on his stand two hours before he heard any suspicious sound. But then, clear above the dreamy sighing of the night-breeze through the waving banners of Spanish moss, he heard the soft crunching footsteps of some

creature, the sound apparently coming from the cellar. And when he heard that sinister approach, for the very first time in Scipio's life an icy chill of genuine fear crept up Scipio's spine. The Specter was no wild cat; that he knew. The beast had hoofs! What if it were really an evil spirit and not liable to mortal death? What if he were really stalking a ghost, what if all the dread stories told about the Romney Specter were true? But Scipio was a brave man, and his determination did not waver. His faith in his musket was wonderful. Getting down softly on one knee he made a rest for his gun with his hand, and so leveled the sight against the black opening of the haunted cellar. Ere he heard another sound, there came to him, wafted on a stray wind of the night, a raw odor, tangy and wild. Then a great gray shape, silent and ghoulish, suddenly filled the doorway of the cellar. It was the Romney Specter.

He was a huge beast as he stood there in the pale starlight, facing the crouching negro. He was as tall as a calf, with peculiar body and legs and a monstrous head. He looked like Malignity. His color was gray, flecked here and there with shaggy black hair. His back arched like a hyena's, and on its ridge the rank

bristles were thin and stiff. His forelegs were longer than the hind and tapered more. His neck was thick and creased, with spiky hair growing in blotches. His head was a horror. There were the cunning and alertly-pointed ears; the wicked glittering eyes, fiery red, yet cold; the dread widening of the jaws toward the nose; the loathsome nostrils and snout, and the white terror of the long gleaming tusks that arched gracefully out of the dreadful mouth. He seemed to radiate foul cruelty and eager brutality.

Scipio waited for the monster to turn. If he shot at the Specter facing, only a few scattering buckshot might lodge in him; and the negro must make very sure. But the creature would not turn. He stood warily, his nostrils widening. Now he stepped a pace forward, his head high in the wind. And then, to Scipio's horror, out of the dim unfathomed night he heard a weird voice call him, "Scipio! Scipio!"

Thrillingly, without sign of warning, the great Romney Specter plunged headlong for the negro. Scipio pulled down on the trigger and sprang aside. But the whirl of the brute's head and the rip of the curving tusks caught him in the leg and bared the bone. Close on the charge of the Specter came a hurrying hu-

man figure; it was Pino, Scipio's brother, who had followed, fearing for the hunter's safety, and it was he who had called out of the darkness. And now he bent over Scipio and began to bind his wound.

But there was no further charge from the creature that had so long and so cruelly haunted Romney. For with a sullen groan, the great wild boar sank back on his haunches, fell over on his side, and was dead.

And so was buried the fear of the Romney Specter. And to this day men are shown the grass tussocks behind which the negro hunter crouched; and one of the most cherished trophies in Scipio's cabin is the huge pair of snowy tusks that once menaced his life.

XV

THE LONE BULL OF MAYBANK

COUNTLESS white bubbles rose to the surface of the dark swamp water. The lily-pads, anchored by their long black stems, were sliding softly here and there on the surface, moved from the depths of the morass by some invisible power. Gently among the bubbles there then appeared what looked like a walnut, floating on the water. Higher it rose, growing wider, more irregular. Dimly two great eyes in protruding sockets cleared the level of the water. Next, the huge armored body of a bull alligator appeared, monstrous and scaly, looking like a dragon of medieval tapestry. With his body half-submerged and his wicked head thrust partly up on a spongy grass tussock, he lay still in the mellow sunshine, hideously contented.

A gray squirrel, with tail arched divinely, barked at him from a cool retreat among the tender leaves of a sweet-gum. A foolish blue jay, that had been inspecting a pine sapling

growing on the edge of the morass, peered impudently at him, scolded him harshly, but suddenly grew afraid, and flew screaming away. The blue and green dragon-flies, that could poise so jauntily on the sere reed tops, whisked daringly over the drowsing alligator, flared in glittering circles above him, and returned with defiant grace to their perches.

Far up in the blue profound of the noonday sky a solitary osprey, which had a nest on the crest of the dead cypress that stood out of the water, gazed down arrogantly on the lord of the morass; for to the enormous old alligator, cruel, cunning and powerful, the community of wild life in that vicinity paid the bitter tribute of a fearful respect. And this realm of the mighty monarch was a kingdom worth ruling.

The lonely morass was on Maybank Plantation, one of the vast rice estates of the old South. For half a century the plantation had been deserted, and nature had long since completed her gracious work of covering the unhappy ruins that showed the trail of man.

For a mile through the pine forest the black channel of the swamp wound a tortuous and sluggish course, having a trickling, weed-choked outlet into the river. On each side of

the narrow channel were water-lily beds, marsh tufts, clumps of buck-cypresses and fringes of green and yellow duck oats. Beyond these was a growth of young canes, dense and rustling; and still beyond, the level brown floors of the pine wood swept gently upward and away.

There had been a time when the swamp had swarmed with alligators, when the great bulls had challenged each other from end to end of the dark channel, when the marsh-beds held many an armored giant, thawing out the chill of winter in the sweet spring sun. But those days, as the days of the plantation itself, had passed.

Some of the alligators had been killed by wandering negro hunters. During the heat and drought of long summers others had crawled off toward the river in search of fresher water, and had never come back. One by one they had passed, one by one. Only the great bull, the most ancient and powerful of them all, remained.

His deep den under the wide-spreading roots of the osprey-haunted cypress held the source of a spring, so that his water-supply was always fresh. His wariness kept him clear of

the few lone hunters who occasionally penetrated those deserted wilds.

As the other alligators left, the problem of his own support became easy for the great alligator. Cruel and slothful was the life that he led. He ruled the swamp, even to its most remote recesses, with a vicious invincible power. Heavy toll he took of the sportive trout that silvered like flashes of sunlight the dark waters of the lagoon; of the gentle and beautiful wood-ducks that built their nests on the low-swinging cypress limbs that brushed the water, trying to rear their fuzzy broods on the retired edges of the tyrant's kingdom; of the tall white egrets, graceful and mild; of the gaunt blue herons that stood in motionless, melancholy ambush, waiting for a chance to pierce or to seize a fish with their javelin beaks; of the wild hogs that rooted on the boggy shores; of the eager hunting-dogs that swam the deep water; of all creatures that came to the haunted morass to drink.

But on this balmy July day, when the monarch with more than usual arrogance viewed his rich domain, moving with indolent strength and assurance among the broad lily-pads, there floated to his nostrils a strange and fascinating

odor, musky and penetrating. The nostrils widened until their black pits shone red, the cold, protruding eyes gleamed, and the huge body grew suddenly tense and eager. Determining the direction from which the scent came, the lone bull, almost without a ripple, sank from sight, rising a few seconds later forty yards nearer the shore. Here he lay under some sheltering grass, watching and waiting.

With soft-lunging, padding strides, a brown bear with her little cub, all roly-poly, roguish and playful, came down the pine-scented, flower-bordered wood-path toward the lagoon. The old bear had never been this way before, and she was wary; but the rich beauty and peace of the surrounding swamp, and the gleam of water through the trees, and the cool, delicious aroma of blueberries growing somewhere near made her forget her usual caution and cunning.

The cub, while not equally impressed by the promises of things material, was still equally unsuspecting and perfectly happy. Once or twice when the big bear grunted her affection to him, he answered with a droll squeak of merriment and abandon. He imitated absurdly his mother's rolling gait. To him the

whole world was a beautiful playhouse, made especially for cubs of his age.

Soon the mother came to a high swamp-blueberry bush, and rearing up, drew the drooping limbs, laden with their misty-purple fruit, eagerly toward her, and crushed the sweet, succulent berries with grunts of satisfied desire.

The cub essayed to follow his mother's example; but the first time he stood up he lost his balance and fell over backward, landing with much amazement but with no injury in a heavy tuft of grass. He rolled over on his side, too lazy for immediate exertion, and gazed with the lambent eyes of indolent admiration at his mother, who was stripping the last branch of its fragrant burden.

The cub swung his feet drowsily back and forth in the air, wondering mildly at his own dexterity. Meanwhile the old bear, with a satisfied rumble, dropped down on her four feet, turned ponderously about, looked at her baby with huge affection, nuzzled him about the sunny grass until he stood up, and then lunged on down the light-and-shade checkered pathway toward the shining water.

Passing a growth of slim cypresses, they came to the rustling cane-brake, like a fringe

to the lagoon. The old bear pushed her way through this until her head and shoulders were clear of the canes on the other side. Then she stopped, sniffed the air, and listened. Close behind her, greatly excited because the tips of his furry feet were in the water, the cub palpitated, wondering what this move might mean.

The morass was unknown to the mother, and for that very reason she was apprehensive. But as she listened, she heard nothing to justify her suspicions. The blue sky bent sweetly over them; the gray moss, pendent from every tree, waved silently in the aromatic breeze; two wood-ducks of gorgeous plumage floated peacefully far out on the bosom of the channel. An amiable old bullfrog, seated on a half-submerged mossy tussock, eyed the bears with the air of a kindly patriarch. A gray sapsucker was following, upside down, the exciting promise of a dead cypress limb.

Still, the mother bear hesitated a long time before she waded into the morass; but some green alligator acorns and some silvery wampee leaves lured her clear of the cane-brake. There she began to feed, and there finally she lay down on the quaking turf to wallow. The cub followed manfully, although he kept on a dry ridge of turf that extended out to the channel.

He was about ten feet away from his mother. Twenty feet away, with just his eyes and the point of his nose showing above the water, the Maybank bull marked his prey.

The lone alligator was intent on a kill. The musky smell of the bears had stirred his sluggish heart to a dull fever of desire. The tiny brain deep in the monstrous head was aflame with eagerness for blood. His cold, glassy eyes gazed with unwinking speculation at his intended victims. He noticed the old bear's apparent forgetfulness and peace, and the cub's separation from her. Just at that moment the little fellow was trying in vain to make a playmate of a droll stolid terrapin, half-grown, that was trying to pretend that he was really nothing at all.

Measuring the distance and singling the cub as his victim, the alligator withdrew silently beneath the black waters. A moment later his eyes rose ever so gently out of the grass-grown lagoon, not six feet from the innocent little bear, which was then slapping playfully at the gaudy dragon-flies as they flirted past him. His mother, although watching him now, was still some distance away, wallowing in the weedy water.

Stealthily, and under the ambush of the glis-

tening wampee leaves, the lone bull drew closer. As he swam softly, he turned so as to give his mighty tail the opportunity to sweep the cub into his crushing jaws. Inch by tragic inch he drew near, leaving but a tiny oily ripple in the water behind him.

There was a short rush, a lunge, the flashing whirl of a mighty tail as of some broad, black scimitar, a terrified squeal from the cub, a furious snort and plunge from the mother. The lone bull's tail had grazed the cub, tumbling him, stunned, into the water; the mother was struggling wildly but vainly in the sucking mud; the red mouth of the great alligator, terrible with tusks, was already open to seize the victim, lying only a foot away.

But then, far from the opposite bank of the lagoon, there came the clear, sharp crack of a rifle, and a white tuft of smoke floated up from the cane-brake.

In a moment the scene was vividly changed. The old bear, working free of the morass, had reached the cub and stood defiantly over it, her great sides heaving in the fierce agony of maternal fear. Almost within reach of her paw, turning in slow, blind, painful circles, with a heavy bullet in his brain, was the lone bull of Maybank, helpless, shattered, dying; and his



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dark blood stained the stagnant waters that he had so long and so cruelly haunted.

Across the lagoon, standing on a fallen log, an old hunter watched this second scene of the tragedy; and even as he watched, the third and last scene was enacted before his eyes. He saw the cub, nuzzled by his fierce old mother, stir feebly; and then the great bear sat back on her haunches, took the cub in her huge, soft arms, rose on her hind legs, and stalked growling out of the morass, disappearing in the purple twilight of the pines.

The hunter could have shot her easily, but being a sportsman and a gentleman, he let the brave old creature carry her baby away in safety. The bull alligator ceased moving, quivered through all his frame, turned slowly over and lay still. And the hunter stepped down from the log and started for his far-off camp.

Then over the great swamp there fell a silence, and such a silence as it had not known in many a year.

For it was a silence that would never be broken by the hollow, terrible roar of the lone bull or the pitiful cries of his victims; but only by the melodious winds choiring through the mighty pines and the songs of happy birds.

XVI

THE TOKEN FLOOD

THE late October rains had been so insistent that, for at least a week, Ned Alston had not sent for the mail; consequently he missed the warning in the newspapers of the coming of the great flood. A certain height of water in the Santee at St. Stephens, Columbia, and Camden always indicated, three or four days ahead, that the river would reach freshet proportions in the delta country. Until now, the master of Eldorado had always been warned in time; and there had never been a time when he had been in more dire need of warning.

It was Primus who brought the word. He explained, in his quaint gullah, that he had just come up the river in a dugout canoe; that there were great logs, the like of which he had never seen, drifting on the vanward waters of the flood; that the eddies everywhere were choked with trash and foam; and that he had seen great clouds of wild-ducks leaving the lower delta for the safety of the gray cypress swamps high up the river.

"A freshet, eh, Primus?" Alston said, while he made the negro stand near the blazing fire in the big hearth of the plantation kitchen and dry out his clothes, telling Amy, the cook, to get him a cup of hot coffee; "well, I'm glad you came by the house to let me know. So you think it will be a big water, Primus?"

The tall negro paused a moment so that his words would have the proper oracular effect.

"Mas' Ned," he replied soberly, "dis is gwine be de Token Flood."

While not taking much stock in negro superstitions, Alston seldom disregarded them, for they frequently contained an element of valuable truth; and so near to the negro's heart that he would never utter it save under the strong impulse of deep feeling.

"The Token Flood," the planter now repeated gravely; "that sounds serious, Primus. Do you think there will be any danger to the Pine Ridge on the Island?"

"Cap'n," the big negro replied prophetically, shaking his head slowly with an import of ominous things, "if dis *is* de Token Flood, dis Great House will be de only dry place on Eldorado."

Alston stepped to the window and looked out thoughtfully on the rainy twilight; on the

hurrying masses of gray and black clouds, and on the bare and lonely boughs that swayed silently against the wind. Primus, he thought, had just come in out of the weather; he had been alone; and the size of the river, vast and indistinct in the rain, had overawed him. Yet, as the master of Eldorado stood gazing out on the forbidding dusk, he could not escape a shiver as premonitions of disaster thronged upon him.

There was much in such a flood that any planter on the delta might lose; but at this particular time of the year, Alston might lose well-nigh everything. All his cattle and hogs were still on their summer pasture on the Island; even the flock of goats was across the river. In a moderate freshet, all of these might have a fair chance of saving themselves; but in a flood they would be helpless. What Alston feared for most were his three horses; the faithful ones which had, throughout the hot summer months, made and harvested his crops for him. The week before, intending to give them a thorough rest, he had sent them across the river in a flat. There had as yet been no frost, and the grass on the Island was lush and green. "I'll not use them at all for a couple of weeks," he had said; "they are

tired out; let them rest to their hearts' content."

From the window the planter turned back toward the tall figure of Primus, who was now hugely enjoying the steaming black coffee. But not even that rare and stimulating treat could remove the serious light from his eyes, the haunted expression of the face, and that alert poise of body which showed him waiting for Alston's orders.

When the planter spoke, he showed that he had come to one of his thoughtful vital decisions.

"Primus, we must get the horses and stock over to-night. Token Flood or not, there will doubtless be a high water, and by to-morrow our help might come too late. How many of the boys are up in the Street?"

Primus looked as if he had expected and dreaded this question.

"Cap'n," he replied, "ain't nobody but dis Primus on Eldorado. Don't you 'member 'bout dat Jubilee Picnic on North Ribber? Eberybody is done gone, sah. I self been there, but I done come back. Nobody else will git back dis night," he added with desolate assurance.

Amy, the cook, who had been listening with

thrills of solemn excitement to the conversation, now volunteered to second the statements of Primus.

"Yes, sah," she said in a loud voice, aggrievedly addressing the frothy dish-water, "Primus done tell de trufe dis time. Ain't nobody lef' on Eldorado but me dis day. And I wouldn't be here neither, Mas' Ned," she added, in a tone expressing both affection and reproach, "if I hadn't been gettin' your dinner."

Alston fully appreciated Amy's sacrifice; for a Jubilee Picnic seemed able to offer her uncommon delights. It did not matter that she always came home with a headache; for she probably reasoned that so humbling an affliction was not an ill companion for the new religious sanctity which she generally acquired on such occasions.

And now the planter looked at her and at Primus, knowing that in these two he had his only helps against the flood.

"Amy," he said in his kindly, earnest way, "I believe you had better just leave those things as they are and go over home. There's a freshet coming down on us to-night. Can you move your little ricestack higher up in the yard out of the water's reach?"

"Yes, my Boss," she answered. Then, as if the opportunity to say something disparaging about her shiftless husband was too good to be missed, she added, in high scorn, "I raise all dat rice, Mas' Ned, and cut it and put it in de stack. 'Course I can move it. If my Ben been here he wouldn't help me. The only time he will work is when dat rice comes on table."

Amy, the counterpart in act and appearance to Salome, now began to don the "seven veils" which were to shield her from the weather: a bandanna first, then an ancient shawl, then a frayed linen napkin, then a square-yard of calico, followed by several head-coverings of startling design and piteous frailty of existence. All the while she was fulminating to herself of the shortcomings of her husband. As she started toward the door, Alston said:

"Primus and I will be over after a little, Amy, to help you."

"Yes, sister," the negro added with a strange gentleness of affection, "we will guard you; so don't you fret yo'self."

"Now, Primus," said the planter, as soon as the door had closed behind Amy, "you and I have to do this whole thing ourselves. First, we must get the stock off the Island; we must

try to save the live things first; then we must get what we can of the crops high and dry. The big flat is at the landing. We must cross the river in it at once."

The tall negro did not demur, though there were still vivid in his mind the perils of the river. What would certainly have seemed impossible to him was apparently possible to the master of Eldorado; and Primus relied with an implicit, unquestioning faith on the guiding intelligence of the white man. Together they were now to face one of the most dangerous tasks that had ever confronted a rice planter in the Santee country.

It was a wild night. The autumn, long delaying, was now coming with affluent rupture from the North. There was in the air, as Alston and the negro stepped out on the back porch of Eldorado, premonitions of tempests and wild behaviors from those skies which for so long had been friendly and radiant. It was a wild night, with wild work ahead for the planter and his single helper.

Together the men went out into the storm and the gray of the falling darkness. The long cypress poles for the flat were brought from the barn; and Alston caught up a big

coil of plowlines to have on hand in case the stock proved unruly.

When they reached the landing, they found that the flood was brimming the great river from the dark wooded bank of the mainland to the far-off marshy shores of the Island. The big rice boat seemed to be flattened against the bushes along the bank, and her hawser was as taut as tuned wire. Alston, for all his determination, could not but regard the aspect of the task before him with misgivings. The mighty river was in a great mood of insurgent power. Pacing seaward, the vast volume of water was magnificently wild and terrible. Debris was everywhere gliding over glassy currents, tossed out of the form of breaking waves, or whirled violently in sporadic eddies. The river had lost all its natural appearances; it had broken the bonds of both physical and spiritual restraint; and now was a lawless elemental creature, tawny-maned, triumphant in its power, and delighting in its kinship with the night and with the storm.

Across the glimmering flood, Alston could barely distinguish the farther shore; the Pine Ridge beyond this, where the stock would be marooned and refugeeing, was lost to view in

the falling rain and the shrouding mist.

The aspect of what confronted him so impressed its menace that Alston, turning to Primus who had loosed the flat and was holding her with a turn of the hawser about a young tupelo tree, said:

"Primus, I feel that I must go after those poor creatures; but I don't want to take you into danger. I believe I can manage the flat alone—"

The planter thought it only right to give the negro a chance to refuse.

Primus gave the big hawser a mighty tug to express some of his feelings in the matter. Then he answered in his deep tones:

"Cap'n, you know me better than dat. I kin drown with you, but I ain't a-gwine to go back on my Boss now, seeing he needs me. Trouble is common to all, Mas' Ned," he added, with the same gentleness in his tone that he had used to Amy; "and you has always stood by me in mine."

A moment later, and the big unwieldy flat had been launched on the vast river, Alston and Primus, finding that in the deep currents their long poles would not propel their ponderous craft, now took hold of the heavy, rough-hewn

oars. So, standing in the misty rain, they urged the flat slowly forward over the tumultuous waters.

Though the river swept them far out of their course, they managed to beat their way across, coming at last to the canal leading up through Jackfield, one of the squares on the Island. There they entered the full canal; and there, in the eerie hush and whisper of the wind through the half-submerged marsh and sedges, they laid down their oars and took hold of their long cypress poles.

It had now grown almost dark; but in the southwest there was a lingering glimmer of light from the track of the setting sun. On the men urged the flat through the "tumultuous privacy" of the storm. At length, from the top of an old cypress stump beside the waterway, a ghostly shape came into view. Alston thought it to be some gigantic white bird brought thither by the flood; but as the flat drew near, the creature cried out pitifully.

Then, for the first time since they had entered on their perilous undertaking, both the planter and the negro laughed.

" 'Tis dat ole ram," said Primus; "you can't drown him. He got sense like people."

As the flat came up, the white ram took a flying leap and landed abruptly but with fine balance in the boat. How long he had been standing on the stump, the men could not guess; nor did they know what might have become of the rest of the flock. But a new impetus had been given to their work; for they rescued at least one refugee from the waters of the Token Flood.

"Primus, shall we tie him in the flat?" Alston asked.

The negro, who professed with some reason a deep understanding of the nature of animals, chuckled in disdain.

"Cap'n," he replied, "you will have to tie dat ole ram to get him OUT o' dis safe place."

They were now making good headway toward the Pine Ridge. There was no need for them to search other parts of the Island for the stock; for on this Ridge alone was there any dry land left. Some, indeed, might be swimming aimlessly about; but there would be no chance for the rescuers to find such stragglers. Finally, just as the darkness of night seemed closing down, the broad bow of the flat grounded on the sedgy shores of the Ridge.

The planter and his faithful fellow-boatman stepped out on the highland. There was still-

ness on the Ridge; but beyond the gnarled live-oaks and the towering pines, whose boughs drooped with the rain, they could hear a suppressed tumult. It was the mighty surge and sweep of the North Santee now ramping seaward wildly through the dusk.

Under the shadows of the drenched oaks, a strange twilight glimmered; and by this the two men made their way forward. When they had come a rod from the boat, they heard a horse whinney, and soon discerned the dark bulk of the huddled animals.

Alston put his hand on the arm of Primus, staying him for a moment.

"We must work it right, Primus. Let us go round to the very end of the Ridge; then come back slowly toward the flat, driving everything before us. In that way, we'll not be likely to leave anything behind. We must go about it carefully, Primus, taking our time, although the daylight has left us."

The tall negro acquiesced in his quiet way, in such a time of crisis alert to understand and ready to execute the will of the planter.

Through the tall sedges, whose rustling had almost been hushed by the rising waters; past ghostly canebrakes, and through dense tangles of briars they went, until they had circled the

Ridge. In the semi-darkness they passed many of the shapes and forms of the animals, some of which seemed to recognize them as rescuers, and others of which broke wildly away from them as if they were final specters of the Token Flood.

Meeting at the northern point of the Ridge, on a sandbar which overlooked the vast sweep of the river, Alston and Primus began their "drive" back toward the flat.

"You're a big help to me, Primus," said the planter, pausing in the darkness to lay his hand momentarily on the negro's shoulder; "I couldn't do this thing alone."

"Even de Token Flood," Primus answered, still haunted by whatever dread foreboding there was in that name, "can't part us, Cap'n."

The strip of dry land remaining on the Ridge was narrow, and its width was momentarily being encroached upon by the waters. For the most part, the driven animals, becoming accustomed to the voices of the men, were docile; and as long as their footing was on the ground, the situation to them was not wholly startling and strange.

But when, driven up the incline into the flat, they felt themselves standing on floating boards surrounded by water, and, out of the shelter

of the trees, now beaten by rain and wind, they became nervous and excited.

In the flat there were twenty head of hogs, a dozen cattle, and the three horses—not to mention the old white goat, which stood, an immovable ghost, in the steadiest part of the long boat. While Primus waited at the bow of the flat to keep the creatures in, Alston went among them, quieting them with his gentle voice and his reassuring manner. He tied the horses to one of the side-rails; the cattle and hogs would have to remain loose. Once well away from shore the planter believed that they would be glad enough to stay in the flat.

At last the boat was shoved away from the Ridge, which receded mistily in the night. It was now quite dark; but the flat was in the big canal, and the course was kept without difficulty. There seemed a lulling in the wind and rain. The flood sweeping over the Island fields had its currents broken in a thousand places; and, spreading over so vast an area, it was neither wild nor of an aspect that boded disaster.

But on approaching the river, all the animals became restless. The hogs moved about, sniffing the wet wind; the cattle, with heads high and eyes big, lowed mournfully; the horses

were slightly crouched, with necks arched and tails held in close. It was really the creatures' actions that made the men realize that they were close to the river. Finally, the dripping boughs of trees, whose trunks were deep in water, brushed their faces. These were the trees marking the submerged river-bank. In another moment the flat had passed the mouth of the canal and was on the tawny breast of the river.

The fierce tide caught the heavy boat and turned it slowly about. Alston and Primus, laboring at the long oars, worked desperately. But though it was now dark, the planter could tell, by the heavy water-pressure against his oar blade, that they were not crossing the river but were going down the current. The creatures were lowing pitifully and were crowding the oarsmen. A huge cypress, dislodged by the flood from its home in the swamps, came looming suddenly out of the night, and its momentum bore crushingly against the flat. The boat trembled, stayed in its course, then, turning completely about, was released from the heavy grasp of the tree. Never in his life had Alston been in so desperate a situation. In the struggle against the crowding cattle and

hogs, and the laboring with the soaked and ponderous oar, he had been steadily trying to keep his sense of direction. But now he knew he had utterly lost it. Both shores were blotted out. Darkness, danger, and the storm were the boat's attendants. And it seemed as though they were its grim convoy to death and destruction.

The planter looked across the boat; and there he could dimly discern the powerful figure of Primus, toiling at the task to which he had been set; as faithful as trust and affection could make a human being. Alston knew well that the negro was relying on him to bring the boat out of its wild peril; but now the planter feared not alone for the safety of the flat, but also for their own lives.

He pulled in his oar and crowded his way through the cattle to Primus. He laid his hand on the negro's shoulder.

"Primus, if anything happens to us, you are to hold on to your oar. It will keep you up. Don't try to save me, Primus," he added, for he knew what the negro would surely attempt to do; "I'll be hanging on to an oar myself. We can ride them ashore, Primus."

Though his concluding words had been

spoken in a jovial tone, Alston went back to his oar with a heavy heart. The animals were now on the verge of stampede. The planter found that his attempts to quiet them were vain. The boat was running on; the rowing of the men was mechanical, for their purpose in it was uncertain. There seemed nothing in the world anywhere but night and a cataract of wild waters plunging to death.

But suddenly, with a misty uncertainty, on a far shore, there gleamed a light. It moved about. It was lost to view. It reappeared.

"Primus!" shouted Alston, "the light, see the light! 'Tis the mainland, 'tis Eldorado! Pull hard, and I'll back her up!"

Directed by the wavering light, and given by it the final strength they so sorely needed to carry them across, the men toiled heroically. Somewhat quieted by Alston's shouting, the animals gave the men a chance to use their powers to the utmost. The ponderous boat made headway over the black waters. The light grew larger. A bush rasped along the side of the flat. The bow ran suddenly into a heap of sedge. They had reached Eldorado. . . .

Alston and Primus had no difficulty in getting all the animals out except the old ram.

He steadfastly refused to budge; and held his post until daylight showed him that he was not going ashore at a doubtful place.

While they were tying the flat, it was Amy who came down with the lantern.

"Amy!" exclaimed the planter in astonishment, "I thought I sent you home to look after your rice."

Looking as she always did when she had been caught in the act of doing something good, Amy said in her shame-faced way:

"Mas' Ned, I was obleeged to save yo' rice fust," and she waved the lantern toward the big stack she had moved up out of the reach of the waters. "Mine can wait, sah," she added simply.

A tear gleamed in the planter's eye. He could hardly trust himself to speak.

"You saved more than the rice, Amy. If it hadn't been for that light. . . . But come, it is not too late to save your rice, and that of all who are at the Jubilee Picnic from the waters of the Token Flood!"

XVII

JOEL'S CHRISTMAS TURKEY

JOEL'S place was the kind that one comes upon suddenly in the pineland wilderness of the Carolinas; the few meager fields and parched pastures leading up to it were unfenced, and appeared to be but an open stretch of the monotonous landscape. There were no groups of whitewashed buildings behind it, nor pleasant vistas of orchards and meadows; for Joel was a poor white woodsman and trapper, and his home was in the great pine barrens of the coast country of South Carolina. The nearest settlement was eight miles away, southward down the lonely, grass-grown road. His cabin, built of rough-hewn, sap-pine logs, already beginning to sag along their length and to be crushed where the weight of the structure caught them, squatted in a rude clearing not much larger than the building itself. Scrub pines and sparse patches of gallberry and low-bush huckleberry bushes grew almost to the door; a weedy path led from the road, along which few travelers ever passed,

to the rotted doorstep-block. The reason why Joel's home was so unhomelike was simple: he had never married, and his real home was in the woods.

Joel was accounted the best woodsman in his county; and while he had many rivals, he had no peers. He killed on the average of twenty deer a season, and his record on wild turkeys was even more formidable. Joel always said that he had never been to school long enough to learn to count above the legal number of deer that the law allowed to be taken in a season; besides, his third cousin was game warden. But for all his craft, there was a wild turkey living in the tupelo swamp behind his cabin that had made Joel stretch himself, and, so far, stretch himself in vain. It seemed to the hunter that he had used every whit of his strength, woodcraft, patience, and tireless energy of pursuit in the attempt to win this royal prize; and doubtless the wild gobbler knew something of the relentlessness of Joel as a hunter, and just how wary he had to be to keep his distance from Joel's deadly musket. This turkey could not speak human speech as can some of the creatures about which our fanciful naturalists write. He could not put his finger to his nose and scoff at Joel, saying,

"O sad brother, I am the Wise One. Booloo is my friend. I shall meet him at the Council Tree at midnight, and you will never find us any more." He was just a plain turkey; but when that has been said all has been said that need be mentioned; for if a plain wild turkey is not the most intelligent bird afeot or awing, then the dodo isn't dead.

Joel had first seen him one sultry September day, when the pine woods were fervidly hot, when the grass was as sear as tinder, and when the lush-grown swamps were sending up in steaming moisture the little water that the long drought had left in them. There was no wing stirring. The birds, hidden deep in the thickets, were still. Even the wood-cicadas had ceased their dry, insistent shrilling. Joel, coming down a sandy path through the scrub-oak, not far from the west bank of the Santee River, heard a hen-turkey's sudden and startled "put! put!" Joel halted in his tracks, while his keen gray eyes swept the bushy savanna over to his left, whence the sound had come. He did not see the mother, but he saw the young one (there appeared to be but the one) as it came stepping from behind the shelter of a broomsedge tussock. A half-grown wild gobbler he was, remarkably large and well formed. He was

so big as to be awkward; but, like all members of his hunted race, he was shy and swift and wonderfully gifted in the woodland art of silently and suddenly effacing himself. For a second he was in Joel's sight; then he vanished. When a wild turkey vanishes, after having seen a man, depend upon it, bank upon it, he's *gone*.

Joel came cautiously round the edge of the thicket, looking for others of the brood. But he saw none. Not far away was the sandy road, and toward this the trapper went; for if one cannot see the game itself one can at least have the dubious satisfaction of seeing its tracks. In the damp sand where a summer-dried stream had crossed the road, he found the turkey's tracks. There, lightly and springily set, were those of the hen; while beside them were great, sprawling tracks, with big, wide-spreading toes that mashed the sand.

"Well, now, jest look at that!" muttered Joel as he bent over them; "the young un's feet are bigger than his ma's!"

Then he stood up and looked toward the dark swamp into whose deep recesses the two turkeys had vanished. Knowing the pine woods from the Santee to the Cooper, and from the railroad to the sea, the trapper knew where these turkeys would feed, range, roost.

And he felt sure that by Christmas-time the hen and the fine young gobbler would bring him a big price from some epicurean clients of his living down in the village on the nearby coast.

The luxuriance of the summer passed into the mournful beauty of the autumn, and the autumn gave place to the winter; but still Joel had not fulfilled the plan he had made that September day when for the first time he had looked at the turkey-tracks in the road. A score of times he had seen the splendid wild bird; other turkeys fell before his gun; but the big bronzed racer of the pineland always escaped. The winter wore along to the early spring, but Joel was still unsuccessful. Late one March afternoon, on his return through a tupelo swamp after a trip for raccoon, Joel heard the gobbler down in a heavy clump of cypresses gobbling a provoked answer to a rookery of crows that were cawing away in their careless fashion. As soon as he got to his cabin the trapper took down from a smoke-blackened beam a small white bone, the radius of a turkey's wing. He washed it, blew through it, squinted down it; then, placing it to his mouth and hollowing his hands in front of it, he drew forth the soft and pleading notes of a hen turkey.

"That will fetch the old sport," he said to himself; "leastwise I never yet seen the gobbler that wouldn't jest streak it for me when I called."

It was still quite dark when Joel stepped out of his cabin next morning. The vast forest was sleeping under its mantle of mist. In the velvet-purple of the night sky the stars shone beautiful. High in the darkness the crests of the mighty pines murmured and waved. Fragrances of the wild and virgin woods moved subtly across the path down which Joel stepped, and met him also, more deep and rich, in the glimmering road. But the trapper, to whom such influences were too ordinary to be impressive, pushed on rapidly through the mist. Slung under his right arm, with its cap and priming kept dry by the flap of his old coat, was his musket; an ancient weapon, decidedly out of date as far as appearances were concerned, but one which had never yet failed Joel. On the few occasions when he had missed, he had never blamed his musket for it. No good hunter ever blames his gun, when once that gun has proved itself true.

A short walk down the road brought the turkey hunter to a blind sheep path, which an

ordinary man would have passed without seeing; but, to him, the woods and their ways were as well known by night as by day. On he tramped through the bush-hung path. The gallberry bushes drenched him with their dew. The cool, misty tops of the bending broomsedge brushed him with a rainy fragrance. There were many odors of the coming spring wafted on the night air. Joel did not walk carelessly; he stepped with the easy stride of a woodsman, yet with caution and alertness. Only a woodsman knows how to be alert without being strained. Through these woods he was traversing there was danger; for on a certain day of that same week he had counted fourteen rattlesnakes, dragging themselves across his path, lying in loose coils between the tussocks of broomsedge, and sunning themselves beside fallen logs and sheltering stumps.

In half an hour Joel came to an airy ridge in the woods, and here he halted. Behind him lay the darksome forest, still dreaming in its mantling mists; but before him, like the effulgence from some distant fire, there was a living glow in the sky. Slowly the velvet-purple of the heavens changed to a velvet-violet, then to a velvet-blue. Beyond the vast tupelo swamp

where he had roosted the gobbler, the red colors brightened and extended themselves along the horizon.

Joel sat down on a log, laid his musket carefully across his knees, took out his turkey call, and sounded tentatively a few trial notes. The sound was clear and sweet, and the atmosphere was just right for carrying it. He followed his big bronzed hands and drew luring music from the white bone; plaintive and pleading and feminine were the notes that came forth. In them were the tenderness and glamour of the voices of young love and the early springtime, voices of hope and of promise.

Far away, on his lonely roost in the huge old moss-draped cypress, the gobbler heard the sound. It pierced the solitude with a poignant sweetness that could not be resisted. Loudly and with masculine assurance he gobbled an answer to the yearning call. Then he launched himself out on his powerful wings, and sailed, straight as a quail flies for cover, toward the crouching hunter. The big turkey came to ground on the edge of the swamp; and there, being greeted by a further call, very soft this time, he put his head forward and down and raced for his alluring goal.

Joel had heard him gobble, but he did not

see him coming. Had he known that his royal game was so near, he would have gone down on one knee in the grass. But instead of that he did something that was fatal to his success: he took the call from his mouth and shook the moisture out of it. The hunter had a flashing glimpse ahead of him of a broad bronzed back and a darting blue-black head. Before he could throw his musket up the vision was gone. Silently the great swamp, the sanctuary of the hunted, had taken back its own. Into its secure refuge the great wild bird had vanished.

"I knowed better'n that," said Joel disgustedly, still sitting on his log. "I might have knowed he would come a-pokin' up. But now he's gone; and by *gone* I mean he's *cleaned up*, quit the country, maybe quit the world. If a man doesn't shoot a turkey the minute the turkey sees him, it's good-by, Susie. And I could yelp here all day and he wouldn't even stop getting away from me. I reckon he thought I was shaking my finger at him. Gentlemen, he's a sundowner. But I don't deserve to have him."

The pineland hunter rose to his feet, knowing that his game had escaped him, knowing,

too, that for a long time it would be practically impossible to get the wary old gobbler to come to his call. But there were other ways of getting this bronzed racer of the wilderness; and to a man like Joel the woods would not long deny another chance at the coveted prize.

But the spring and the summer passed, and he saw no more of his gobbler. But the autumn, with its bared forests and its fallen crop of acorns to attract turkeys to special places, brought Joel once more into distant acquaintanceship with the big bird. Once he had stalked him among sweet live-oak acorns under the giant oaks on a deserted plantation; but the wary monarch had been just a flash too quick for him. Again he thought he had cornered him in a big patch of high blackberry canes in the woods; and if Joel could have made him fly, the turkey would have been his. But the crafty bird refused to rise. After beating about the briars into which he had seen the gobbler skulk, Joel came out into the road, and there he saw the racer's huge tracks—the flying trail left by him in the sandy loam. Joel whistled incredulously as he stood up after measuring the tracks.

“Four inches from tip to tip,” he said: “the

biggest gobbler that ever ran these woods. And he'll be mine afore long, or my finger never touched trigger!"

But another whole year passed, and yet another, and Joel was still without his prize. His continual hunting of the big turkey had made that splendid creature abandon his old haunts. He no longer fed in the dense bays and gallberry patches of the Little Ocean; he no longer roosted in the tupelo swamp. Out of the pine woods and towards the river swamps Joel had driven him. The hunter did not altogether approve of the turkey's new range, for well he knew that if once the gobbler took a notion to cross the river he would probably take up with other members of his own tribe in the swamps and pinelands on the North Santee side, never to return to his former home. This was especially likely, Joel knew, if he were not hunted beyond the river. During this last year he had been dividing his time among three or four old deserted plantations—Romney, Montgomery, Oldfield and Fairfield—that bordered on the Santee delta. It was on Romney, one November morning, that Joel had shot at the huge gobbler as he sailed off his roost in a giant short-leaf. But, as he said to himself with grim humor, "I kindled, but he did

not curtsey." For a month thereafter he saw nothing of the object of his quest.

The twilight of Christmas Eve was falling as Joel, weary but hopeful, traversed the desolate, sandy field leading from the pine woods to the river bank on Romney Plantation. All day long he had followed the giant gobbler, and even the hardihood of Joel was sorely taxed. But before him in the sand he saw the fresh tracks which had been left by the wonderful bird he was pursuing. At length he came to a fringe of trees marking the bank of the river. Hardly had Joel paused to look and to listen when, from a thickety clump of elders, a hundred yards away, a great bulk rose heavily and beat its way over the marsh. Its flight took it upward, and bore it into a huge moss-shrouded cypress that stood on the very brink of the wide river. There it alighted heavily; clearly against the afterglow in the sky Joel could see its great bulk rock on the limb, lower its weight carefully, and at last settle on its perch. He had roosted the mighty bird! At last, after all those years, he was going to have a fair chance at the largest and craftiest wild gobbler that had ever ranged the Santee country.

For a half-hour, while the light died and the

noises from field and fen wakened and were hushed again, Joel sat in the dry grass with his keen eyes riveted on the black mass that never stirred in the ancient gray cypress. At last the real darkness was at hand, and he must make his shot before it would be too late to see his game.

He could not cross the boggy marsh that lay between him and the big cypress. But a short detour, by way of an old check-bank, brought him almost under the vast bulk of the tree. Through the branches, draped with moss, he saw the Christmas stars; and motionless on a stout limb, to Joel's tingling satisfaction, sat the great wild turkey. All the hunter's stalking ended here.

Joel peered this way and that, trying to get his game clear of intervening limbs. It was tense work, as the light was almost gone. Finally, when he dared to step out on the edge of the marsh to get an unimpeded view, he was amazed and bewildered to see *two* black shapes in the cypress, where but one had been visible before. Moreover, they appeared to be of the same size, and they were undoubtedly of the same shape. Joel exclaimed under his breath. His first thought was there were two turkeys in the tree, but then he came to the

conclusion that one was his gobbler and the other was a huge bunch of mistletoe.

But which was which? Joel peered and pondered. The light was going so fast that the great tree had taken on a more shadowy outline, and the two dark shapes were fast merging into the blackness of the cypress branches. Which object should he shoot? Which one was the royal bird, and which one was the bunch of Christmas greens? In vain did Joel crane his neck this way and that, straining his good eyes. Not even he could distinguish between the two dim objects so high up in the night.

At last he raised his musket, gripping it strongly with his bronzed hands. It roared out on the twilight. Its detonation rolled far up and down the misty reaches of the river. And Joel saw two things happen: first, a dark bulk launched itself out from the tree, directing its powerful flight above the river and toward what lay beyond; secondly, another dark shape swayed in the cypress, turned slowly, cracked, and came rushing to the ground. Joel had shot off the bunch of mistletoe. The king of the pineland wilderness had escaped across the river.

But Joel was a game sport. He picked up

the bunch of mistletoe and slung it slowly over his shoulder.

“I’ll take it home and hang it in the house,” he said; “it will ’mind me of Christmas.”

XVIII

THE BANDED DEATH

THE blackberries grew thick by the old rotting rail fence that stretched across the wide field lying between the pine-woods and the river. The adventurous vines climbed over and under the rails, and along their sagging length until they covered, with a green unfalling shower, the upright supports at the corners. The tall sprays that did not rest on the fence bent and swayed under the ripe abundance of their fruit. On one side of the fence was a field of young corn, the cool dark blades just long enough to begin to rustle and wave; on the other side the land was unplanted and the grass and weeds were high and rank. Here and there along the line of the fence was a wild cherry tree where, in the summer, birds of all kinds would feast on and fight over the black and bitter fruit. But now it was only May, and the cherries had hardly formed.

The woman whose husband worked in the

great cotton mill, looming up darkly on the edge of the river, had come out along the old fence to pick blackberries. It was in the afternoon and the air was fresh and sweet, and a part of the grass field was already in the shadow of the pines. The little child she carried in her arms was at the age dearest to mothers; he had just begun to gurgle a few baby words, and when he opened his quaint cherub lips the tiniest of glistening pearls could be seen. He was the woman's only child, and who could not guess how precious to her he was! She had always taken him with her wherever she went, and so, when she came out to gather the first berries of the spring as a treat for her husband's supper, she brought the little boy with her.

When they left the house she had given him the small woven-grass basket to hold, and his chubby hands clutched it tightly. But as they got farther away from the straggling houses of the mill village and into the green fields, shimmering with the nameless promise of the spring; and as the soft wind came whispering up to them and past them, breathing of far blue summer days that had been and of fairer ones to come, then the child, without shame, lost all sense of the grave responsibil-

ity which should have been his as bearer of the basket. He sat up straight in his mother's arms; he crowed; he curled up his little legs and kicked out in sheer infant abandon and delight; time and again he let the basket fall with bubbles of liquid laughter. And the mother only gave it to him again, kissed him, and held him the closer.

They came to where the blackberries were ripe and plentiful, and the woman, putting the baby down, cleared a little space in the grass near the fence. Here she might leave her child in safety while she gathered the blackberries that grew near; and here, after many kisses, she left him.

The child did not cry. He looked after his mother for a moment with wide questioning blue eyes; but his little heart must have been loved into feeling that whatever his mother did must be right, for his face did not cloud. He had learned, on the smooth, yellow pine floor at home, to talk wisely to his toes, and to pass the drear intervals when his mother could not hold him in other like admirable infant occupations. So he was very happy by himself in the warm May sun. He pulled the soft, tender spears of grass and wondered with deep eyes of innocence at a great green grass-

hopper whose length of limb was marvelous. When the child looked over the edge of the grass he could see the blue sky, and the crests of the purple pines, and the falling sun that would soon be behind them. But he was a very natural child and cared less for the glories that would be the setting sun's than for that wonderful grasshopper; he watched him climb a tall spear of coffeegrass that bent under his weight, and crowed with delight and surprise when the gentleman of the long shanks, with a bold leap and a great show of wings, half jumped, half sailed, over the edge of the fence.

For a week the Banded Death had hunted along the river, and now was making his way toward the pinewoods where he had his home. He followed the line of the old rail fence, for it was a direct way and a safe way. And caution had always been his motto since that day, years before, when the gray boar that roamed through the field near the river had trampled him, tusked him, and left him for dead. Through the soft grass at the bottom of the fence he glided slowly; his bright, metallic eyes piloted the way well; he must be able to see a foot ahead of him before he would advance an inch. Now he sloped his big body over a low rail to make a short cut

for the next corner; now his five feet of bone and muscle and scale would suddenly become tense and rigid while the minute ears listened and the beady eyes gleamed with cunning intelligence. The twelve rattles he carried on his tail were evidence that he had been in the world long enough to be very wary and wise. The rattles were stained with river mud and made a harsh whisper as they were drawn through withered leaves or over broken splinters on the fence. At his coming all kinds of wild life fled: the field mice, squeaking shrilly, dived into their holes; the birds, uttering strange cries, rose from the bushes and briars and, circling near at first within the spell of a dread fascination, at last flew wildly and far away. The great fear was upon them all. In savage loneliness the Banded Death moved on. And, for all the bright horror of the wide sunken eyes; the sullen droop, almost human in its malice, at the corners of the mouth; the powerful jaws, articulated with the strength of steel; the huge muscles of the shapely body that could drive a sickening and deadly blow; the faint, cold pallor of thin, contemptuous lips—in spite of all these things the Banded Death was very beautiful. There was the marvel of the color design on his back; the wonderful

muscular control that made his movements rhythmic and flowing; and, above all, the spirit of power that went with him, and the spirit of awe that went before him.

Even the child was old enough to think the Banded Death beautiful. The grasshopper had just flown out of sight when the rattlesnake came gliding up to the clearing that the mother had made for the child; he smelt the freshly trampled grass and the strange odor of man; he slipped along by stealthy inches until his baleful eyes saw into the clearing. There was the child, talking wisely and contentedly to his toes. For some moments the snake lay still and watched; the sight was a decidedly unique one in his experience. After a while his curiosity overcame his caution; hissing softly he came out slowly into the clearing. But he did not advance his full length; he let his body lie in heavy coils; by merely straightening from such a position a tremendous blow could be struck. At last he lay clear of the surrounding grass; and just then the child, a foot away, saw him.

The sun had begun to touch the tops of the pines, and the mother needed only one more handful of blackberries to fill her basket. While she had gathered them she had been

very happy, for her thoughts had been of the little boy and of his father, the strong, true man who had brought so much into her life. Every now and then, as the wind blew toward her, she could hear the child's baby talk and laughter and she felt him to be as safe and happy as she. She must soon be going, she thought, for the little boy must not be kept out in the dew, and besides she always met her husband when he came home from his work. She would pick just this one handful more and then she would go.

The child saw the Beautiful Death that lay in the sunshine on the edge of the bending grass; he had never been afraid of anything; he was not afraid of the snake. He stretched out his little rosy arms toward it and laughed and gurgled. The snake shortened his coil, and in his hiss now there was menace. The last rays of the sun shone on the head of the reptile; they seemed to light up all his evil features. They showed that his eyes had a touch of red in them and were lustful; they showed a fleck of dried blood, not his own, on the cruel curve of the lip; they showed the spreading nostrils and the jaws of iron. But the child could see none of these things; for the child knew nothing of lust, of cruelty, of blood. He rolled

over on his stomach and, taking hold on the grass, pulled himself playfully toward the snake; he touched the monster's cold head with his little warm fingers. And not even then did the Banded Death strike—the child's touch was a caress; in the child's face and voice was neither hatred nor fear. Then the rattlesnake, hissing softly, moved out of his heavy coil, and disappeared in the brush along the fencerow.

That night, when the little child had been safely tucked in his crib, the man and his wife sat in the moonlight on the porch. And she told him of her happy afternoon, of the quiet safety of the green fields, and of how good the baby had been. And as their love thrilled in her voice, he bent near and kissed her tenderly; for they were lovers.

That night, far away in the dim and silent pinewoods, the huge rattler found his old den and his mate.

Why had he not struck the child? God knows.

XIX

THE BLACK MALLARD

TWILIGHT was falling on Hudson Bay, and a keen November wind had set in from the north; swaying the tall and watchful darkness of the firs, bending and rustling the sere reeds, and driving the gray clouds southward. The mallards that had been dozing and feeding on the Bay edges grew uneasy and restless. They quacked with cautious excitement and stretched their wings; they swam in swift erratic semi-circles with their heads erect and turning; they seemed to scent both danger and delight on the autumn wind. And to one solitary drake the whole flock seemed to turn as if for guidance and direction.

As the hart-royal led the great droves of deer in the forests of old England, so this mallard was supreme among his fellows; and there was a bearing about him that made him regal. He was a third larger than any duck there; his plumage, instead of being the soft gray with the green neck and head and the

tinted wing feathers, was jetty and rich like that of a black swan. And now, while the others were quacking vaguely with half-distracted premonitions, he alone seemed superbly sure of himself. He alone appeared to know with certainty the message that was borne to them on that wind out of the freezing North, he alone seemed to feel the wild joy of flight thrill through him. For he was the oldest and the wisest of the mallards, and he knew that the night for migration had come.

The Black Mallard swam a little out into the Bay as if to marshal his forces; then he gave a strident flight-call which electrified the flock. Once more his call rang out; then, striking his great tinted wings on the water, he sprang upward and forward, towering by degrees to a height of four hundred feet, the flock after him, all quacking an understanding chorus and falling into line. The Mallard headed due south, toward the far warm ricefields on the Carolina coast.

Two thousand miles lay before them; two thousand miles under the autumn stars! The silver sickle of the new moon was setting as they began their flight, the flight that would not finally end until they rested on the sunny reefs that fringe the southern ocean. They

were flying with the wind; so there was little need of their phalanx and hollow-triangle formations, but simply the steady straight flight through the vaulted darkness. Beneath them towns and cities flitted past; now they shot over a glimmering river, now over a quiet village with a few mild pilgrim lights; now over a dark forest where the wind and the stars held mystic communion; now they flashed above bays and inlets where the salt tide, brimming high, and the reeds and the marshes and the scawind called to them in myriad tongues that spoke but one word, and that a word to lure them downward to delights. But the Black Mallard was not to be lured. Through the high cold air his flight was steady and strong; the great pinions were bearing him southward at seventy miles an hour. The little moon and its faint afterglow had long since disappeared. The smaller stars grew clearer, while the huge night grew more silent and more empty. And on the wonder and swiftness of a faultless flight the ducks rushed southward. Nor were they lonely in their passage; for far through the hollow darkness were speeding many voyagers, calling to one another in their mystic voices.

Throughout the night this matchless flight continued; and when the east flushed, and the

dawn came, dewy and radiant as from a fresh unwearied world, the Black Mallard led his cohorts winding down the "invisible staircase of the wind" until they alighted on a small river, overarched by willows and birches. There they spent the day. But with the twilight their passage was continued. New England was left behind; New York City looked like a blur of foggy light as they whirled a few miles to westward of it; now they skirted the Jersey coast; Delaware followed; they sighted the vast calm waters of the Chesapeake gleaming under the timorous glances of the maiden moon. Then came the Potomac, and the long low Virginia shores, behind which lay a deeply-wooded country, with here and there overgrown fields and deserted plantations. Soon they reached the North Carolina line and the great belt of long-leaf pines. Already to the east, over the heaving gray ocean, the sky was becoming pale; one by one the smaller stars went out; the planets looked white and high. And in the air was the fragrance, the rapture, the wonder of the South; the warmth, the spicy odors, the aromatic winds, the luring sweetness of an exquisite charm. Beneath the migrants the crests of the purple pines were touched into golden light by the rising sun.

The coast line was beginning to be fringed with dark growths of gnarled cedars. The ducks were almost at their journey's end. Still onward forged their great leader until at last, when they had come to the mouth of a turgid yellow river, he turned to the eastward and led his followers seaward. Finally, with a great whirring of wings and calls of weariness and delight they settled on a glimmering sand-reef, a mile off the mouth of the Santee River, and two thousand miles from Hudson's Bay!

There all day long they rested and sported in the salt water; and when the flood-tide that would bring the high water into the ricefields came with the sunset, still led by the Black Mallard they rose and flew some five miles up the river where they settled in the overgrown fields to feed; and such a rare and succulent supper was awaiting them! There were wampee-buds, wild-grass heads, duck-oats, an abundance of waste volunteer rice, and now and then a delicious alligator acorn.

Several times during their flight over the delta, on the reed-hidden check-banks beneath them, they were aware of dark ominous figures; but ever the Black Mallard led them high above the danger of the negro hunter. He piloted them across the river-row of ricefields and

headed for a far corner on the very edge of a somber cypress swamp; and in that secluded retreat, overgrown with marsh and duck-oats, where the first stars gleamed softly in the brimming tide, they towered down on roaring wings and were soon feasting in the warm still water in and out among the clumps of marsh and the tall reeds.

A few days after the flight of the Black Mallard and his followers, Colonel Jocelyn met Scipio Lightning, the negro poacher, trespassing amiably on one of his ricefield banks; but the Colonel, being above suspicioning any man of poaching, greeted him with one of his benign smiles. There was an ancient friendship between the two, endeared by many a hardship and by many a pleasure together in the woods and fields of the old Santec country.

Scipio was carrying his musket as he strolled nonchalantly down the bank, but when he saw the Colonel he shoved it down in the coffee-grass on the margin, not pausing in his walk, and marked the place by a twist of his naked foot in the mud.

"Well, Scipio," remarked the Colonel, "you are pretty sprightly for an old fellow like you." The Colonel himself was beginning to feel his years, and at no time showed it more plainly

than when he playfully remarked on the infirmities of others.

"Yes, Boss, dat's so," replied the wily Scipio. For reasons of precedent, the negro never met the old planter without entertaining thoughts of a gift; and at this time he particularly coveted a plug of tobacco from the Colonel's commissary. Resorting to guile, therefore, he opened the campaign with a most respectful and expectant silence.

"Scipio, do you remember when you were paddling me over Moorland last winter that big mallard drake that we saw? He looked like a mallard, but he was as black as a raccoon's rings. Don't you remember him?"

"Yes, sah, I 'member dat ole fellah," responded Scipio.

"Have you seen him this year?"

"No, sah."

"You know they sometimes come back to the same feeding-grounds. He may come back this season if some pot-hunter doesn't kill him. If you ever see a pot-hunter on my place, Scipio, you let me know. They're a bad lot, all of them."

"Dat's so," responded the poacher amiably, though he had some personal feelings in the matter. Yet he felt, down in his heart, that

it was shoddy work to deceive the dear old Colonel whom he loved and for whom he would do anything. He felt this the more strongly because only the evening before Scipio had seen the Black Mallard. Still, if he told Colonel Jocelyn, he knew very well that the old gentleman would have him paddling all the old rice-fields on the river; pushing up blind creeks and poking around canebrakes, talking all the while in that loud yet cautious whisper that would make the ducks get up three hundred yards away, frightening them far more than a war-whoop would have done.

"Well, Scipio," the Colonel concluded with some disappointment, as he gazed over the rich sweep of riceland with here and there a far glimpse of cabin, or winding river, or gray plantation house, "if you should see the mallard or hear of him, let me know. You and I can go after him together—. And, Scipio, come up to the house to-night; I have a piece of tobacco there that's tired of waiting for you."

With that, the old gentleman turned away and passed down the bank toward the overseer's house.

Scipio had become restless, for he did not know how long the Colonel would engage him

in conversation; and the best chance for a shot at the Black Mallard was on a bank running into the cypress swamp more than a mile away. And it was nearly time for the evening flight to begin. Therefore as soon as Colonel Jocelyn had gone what seemed to the negro a discreet distance, Scipio stooped level with the coffee-grass and scuttled down the bank to where he had left his musket. Grasping it at the balance he struck out in a swift fox-trot for a far-away corner-field,—lonely, adjacent to the great cypress swamp, and a place so remote that no negro but Scipio would venture into it at twilight.

He had seen the Black Mallard come into that very field the evening before, and though he had been almost within gunshot, the drake had not seen him, and would therefore probably return to his favorite feeding-ground that night. Reaching the field before the up-river flight of ducks began, he left the bank and bogged out into a thick clump of marsh that would make a better blind than the sedge on the bank. Scipio was no ordinary hunter; for when he was after game—especially game for which a gentleman of the Santee Club had offered a bounty—he was not content to make reasonably sure of a kill, but must needs make positively cer-

tain. Therefore he paid little heed to those things which were a part of the price of his success—the trembling alligator-beds on which he stepped, the cold water in which he stood up to the waist. He made his way into the marsh carefully so that not even the wisest of the mallards would see his trail; with great patience he bent aside the sharp blades, feeling for a footing on the marsh-roots. He reached the center and there stood still, the musket lying in the hollow of his arm, his battered cap slouched over his eyes, and his keen sight searching the southeastern horizon.

Scipio was a long way from home. The night was fast coming on. Near him loomed, shadowy and vast, moldering in silence, the gray unsearchable cypress swamp. The water in which he stood was the home of many a deadly reptile. On the bank which he must traverse in the dark on his homeward journey lurked the huge diamond-back rattler, truculent and deadly. The bed of the morass on which the negro's weight rested was treacherous; it was a quagmire that quaked when he breathed; a false step might plunge him over his depth.

Over the earth and sky there had now fallen a wonderful stillness, divinely wistful and poignant with twilight thoughts and twilight images.

The colors in the west—rose, and ivory, and silver-gray—were fading. In the red glow above the dark pine forest the evening star hung like a raindrop on a rose. The tide was at its height and seemed asleep. From far, far away, from the heart of the pinewoods, beyond the river, came the melodious voice of a negro, whooping on his way home. But Scipio had but one thought—the Black Mallard. His eyes were fixed on the sky-line; it was there that the first of the flight would be visible. He waited motionless, completely hidden by the tall marsh, a dusky sinister figure. Once or twice he stroked his musket affectionately; crude it was, coated with rust, gaping in the seams, but a fatal weapon in the hands of the poacher.

Suddenly the great stillness was broken by a barred-owl's hoot and scream. Then, from some swamp up the river, a flock of blue-winged teal shot by like a charge of bullets; then two wood-ducks with weird soft calls whirred down over the cypresses and splashed into the water within a few feet of the marsh where Scipio stood. But the negro must get the shot he wanted or none at all. He had just the one load in the musket, and that was for the Black Mallard. Soon, now, the flight from the coast

began to stream in. First came a few wary pairs, with wings set wide to flare at a moment's notice of danger; then long lines of black-ducks and widgeons, too hungry to be heedful, too far away from men's dwellings to fear men, too safe in the multitude of their number to be suspicious. They swarmed over Scipio's marsh until the air was resonant with the whistling music of their wings, with strident calls, with old-comrade quacks, with now and then a cautious, lest-we-forget q-u-a-c-k! from a wise old drake. They were lighting all about the marsh, and there was just enough of the faint glow left in the west for Scipio to distinguish them; sprig-tail, widgeons, shovelers, canvas-backs, teal, wood-ducks, buffle-heads, baldpates, green-headed mallards. But the Black Mallard had not come. The twilight was darkening, and soon the flight would be over. Perhaps the monarch was already feasting in some other field. Scipio was about to give up, and had actually leveled his musket on a flock of black-ducks swimming near him, when some instinct made him turn his gaze toward the faded horizon. A great bulk loomed in the empty heavens. It was rushing down on the negro poacher. The Black Mallard was at last within his grasp!

Scipio gripped his musket as he had never done in his life before, while his gaunt muscular body became tense. Against the broad glossy breast of the great mallard the brass sight of the iron gun glimmered. Finer and finer the negro drew the sight; his finger tightened slowly on the trigger; and—the quaking grass on which he stood, overstrained by the man's weight that he exerted in his excitement, broke under him! One leg shot down to the hip in the sucking mud. His musket roared out, belching fire, fumes, and smoke; but it was aimed at nothing, and it almost kicked the negro's arm off. Struggling, sputtering, groping for something that would not give way under his feet or the touch of his hands, Scipio finally managed to pull himself up on the alligator beds again. Thence he labored out of the sedgy morass to the bank. There he shivered and stamped his feet. Then he took off his old cap and bared his head to the waking stars.

“Dat's the last time,” he said, in a voice that showed that in spite of his profession there was still much good left in Scipio, “I will ever lie to the Cunnel! Dat, and nothing else, made me lose my shot.”

So when he went to the “Great House” that

night to get his tobacco, Scipio told the Colonel about the Mallard: though he knew it would insure the safety of that splendid creature of the wild.

XX

A FOX AND A CONSCIENCE

CONSCIENCE," the negro minister had solemnly said in his sermon that Sunday, "is sho' going to keep a man good. It will make yo' 'fraid to lie, or steal, or bear false witness."

Uncle Ben, the old negro who had outlived his generation and all those of his color who knew him and loved him, and who was sheltered in his desolate age by Col. Henry Jocelyn, had listened intently to the sermon. The word *conscience* had moved him strangely. There was something just and pure about it.

For the greater part of Monday, Uncle Ben, with his gray head bowed and his huge hands hanging idly by his side, sat in his solitary cabin and mused over the message that had come to him. All his physical faculties had long since been impaired; but his mental faculties remained perfectly clear. And as he pondered the sermon, nearly every word that the preacher had said was crystal clear to him.

When at last, late in the afternoon, he took

his old battered cedar bucket and went through the great airy pine woods toward Horry Spring, where he got his daily supply of drinking water, the scenes that he had known and loved so long took on a new and more significant aspect. He felt that his attitude toward them, which in the past had been governed by a capricious will, should be governed only by conscience in the future. And for some reason the noble pines seemed to him far more noble this afternoon, the mellow winter sunlight far more benign and tender, and the saffron jasmine flowers far more heavenly and pure.

Buried in thought, he wandered beyond the spring, and had to retrace his steps. Blood-colored bay leaves lined the bottom of it; in the pool, the water was dark red, but when dipped up it was fresh and clear.

From dewy retreats haunted by swamp thrushes and bullfinches, the little stream rippled on over its snowy pebbles into the dimness of the shadowy forest. On and on it flowed, through the hushed thicket of myrtle and through a dark swamp where cypresses rose with their silken crests, until at last it poured into the Santee River, just below the home of Colonel Jocelyn.

Serene as was the flow of the little stream, its peaceful tide was not usually more tranquil than the life-tide in the heart of the genial and gentle old colonel. But on this day there was great trouble on the plantation. Nothing of so serious a nature had happened on the plantation since the blind mule Maria had died, five years before. The fact was that a fox had been taking heavy toll of the colonel's game chickens. Five had been stolen before the loss had been discovered.

The chickens had been taken, of course, at night; the ragged remains of one especially fine cock had been found in the broom grass near the chicken yard. The intruder had had the boldness to devour his prey almost beneath the colonel's bedroom windows.

The colonel's fox-hunting days were over, and his once famous pack of hounds had diminished to a solitary creature, which, toothless and half blind, dozed in the sun all day, and which did not have heart to howl at the full moon at night. So the colonel was at a loss to know how to put a stop to the depredations. Many of his best chickens, with a high-bred dislike of being cooped in a house for the night, slept out on the fences near the yard,

and in low trees near by. Colonel Jocelyn half believed that any game chicken that would go to roost meekly in a chicken house, when it had several thousand acres to roam over during the day, had a strain of common blood in it somewhere. Fuming up and down under the big live-oaks, the old gentleman tried to devise some scheme for thwarting Master Reynard. As he paced up and down, Maj. Blythe Biddecomb, owner of the adjoining plantation, rode up.

"What's the trouble, colonel?" he exclaimed, reigning in his mule Daphne with some show of flourish and effort, although the mule had been cropping the long succulent grass before the major ever ordered it to halt.

"It's the worst luck, Blythe," answered the colonel, glad indeed to have some sympathy and advice. "Five of my finest games are gone—stolen."

"Fox?" queried the major.

"Yes," said the colonel, leaning wearily against the rotting stake-and-rider fence. "I reckon it must be a fox. I found some fresh tracks crossing the road down by the low gate, and my prize bronze-back cock I came across in the broom grass over there—half eaten.

Maybe that old hound nosed him out before he finished his meal."

"All gone in one night?" questioned Major Biddecomb, who liked to treat all subjects with legal precision.

"I don't believe so," returned the colonel. "What would *you* do, Blythe?"

"Fox gun," answered Major Biddecomb gravely, as if he were suggesting some unusual device. "It's the only sure cure for your kind of chicken thief. I got a gray fox three years ago with one, colonel, although he had already cost me a couple of fine hen turkeys. S'pose you bring your old shotgun out, and I'll rig her up for you."

Colonel Jocelyn got the old double-barreled gun from the house, and he and the major set the fox trap. They were as eager as two boys. First they piled some brush lightly in two rows to make a rough pathway from the thickets near by to the fence of the chicken yard. Then near the chicken house they tied the gun on a low box with the muzzle pointing straight down the pathway. The major, who was evidently familiar with the mechanism of fox traps, fastened one end of a long cord to the triggers, passed it round a smooth stake driven

into the ground immediately behind the gun, and carried the other end some little distance down the pathway, where he passed it round two other stakes driven on opposite sides of the approach. The slightest touch on the cross cord would discharge the load from the gun.

When the work was done, Major Biddecomb rode off homeward. He felt that he had spent a most neighborly and profitable afternoon; but he failed utterly to inspire the unresponsive Daphne with any of the kindliness of his heart. She only rolled her angular head from side to side, whisked her dry tail, and ambled off at a slow gait.

On the other side of the plantation, Uncle Ben was thinking about conscience; he tried to fathom its mysteries, to realize its beauties, to understand its bleak austerities. The dogma of conscience hummed through his brain so insistently that he became a little tired of it. When he came home from Horry Spring he tried to forget all about it; but he could not. Again and again the questions of conscience assailed him.

As he stepped down from a shelving, sandy bank into the main road, he slipped on a bare pine root and upset his precious bucket of wa-

ter. He had to go back nearly a mile in order to refill it; he was alone and old, and the shadows of the December twilight were already darkening the mighty pines. When at last he reached his lonely cabin it was night, and his desolate home loomed solitary in the darkness. Sighing, Uncle Ben sat down on the hickory-block doorstep to rest; and not until then did it flash across him that it was Monday night, and that he had not a bite to eat in the cabin. He always got his week's allowance of food from Colonel Jocelyn's commissary on Monday. The commissary would now be closed, and he had eaten nothing that day except two half-burned sweet potatoes early in the morning. He felt scarcely strong enough to go over to the plantation house. Yet he knew that Colonel Jocelyn and his daughters, the only friends that he had left in the world, would give him plenty to eat and a warm place to sleep if he would go over to the great house. He wondered vaguely why conscience, which he knew to be so great, did not give him aid and comfort now.

After a little while the darkness gathered so deep, the barred-owls hooted so weirdly, and the rasping bark of the foxes in the old negro

burying ground sounded so near, that the aged negro struggled painfully to his feet and shuffled off down the black road toward the plantation house.

When he had passed the stables he saw the huge white bulk of the great house looming spectral and silent beneath the majestic live-oaks. But, alas, there were no lights visible! He was too late; he had not been able to walk fast enough. More than ever was he alone now in the solitary night. But no, not alone. For as he stood there,—a pathetic figure of weariness and bewilderment,—he heard a great outcry in the darkness, and three proud game roosters, each trying to outdo the others, announced confidently and importantly that it was eleven o'clock. Uncle Ben knew well enough where they were. He also knew how to lift one noiselessly from its perch; for, although he had never stolen a chicken, he had raised many of them. He was standing near the end of the path that led up to the chicken house. The roosters could hardly be more than twenty feet away. He even heard one of them clear its throat sedately as it settled down for another nap.

The old negro took a step or two toward

the sleeping chickens and then paused to listen. He heard one of his prizes stir on its roost; but there was now no other sound except the hooting of a swamp-sequestered owl far away. On his hands and knees Uncle Ben crept closer until he was almost within arm's reach of his prey.

The cross cord of the Jocelyn-Biddecomb fox gun stretched a foot ahead of him, straight across his pathway. He was crouched so low that the full charge of buckshot would probably take its awful effect in his pitiful sunken breast.

But a foot away from the deadly hidden string he halted. A deep pain was in his heart; a keen and angry light seemed to flash a menace before his eyes. He sank back in the path, drew in a long breath, and looked up at the tremulous white stars. The words of the preacher rang in his ears: "Conscience is sho' going to keep a man good. It will make yo' 'fraid to lie, or *steal*, or bear false witness."

So this must be the doing of conscience! Clear and swift as a thunderbolt out of the pure, silent heavens, conscience had struck him, had pierced his heart, had brought him poignantly face to face with the fact that he was

being a thief—and thieving from the kindest, gentlest, most generous old gentleman on earth.

Uncle Ben rose stumbling to his feet and passed on up the road that led to his forlorn cabin on the other side of the plantation.

As he neared the cabin, he was startled to see a lantern swinging in the path and to hear voices laughing. As he emerged like a shapeless shadow into the brightness, he saw to his amazement that it was Colonel Jocelyn and his two daughters.

“Why, hello, Uncle Ben!” the colonel called heartily. “Where have you been this time of night?”

“Oh, Uncle Ben, guess where we’ve been!” cried out Lucy Jocelyn.

“We’ve been robbing your cabin, Uncle Ben!” cried Alice Jocelyn merrily.

Still laughing joyously, they left the bewildered old negro trembling in the darkness.

When he reached his cabin he found a cheerful fire burning on the wide hearth. On the chair, on the floor, and on the long wooden bench were great bundles done up in white paper. Uncle Ben could not understand it at all. He went from one package to another, and wonderingly opened each. In one was a

huge sugar-cured ham. In another was a box of ginger crackers and a peck of sweet potatoes. And in the last package—could he believe his eyes!—was a great game rooster, all ready to be cooked.

Then Uncle Ben went down on his knees and covered his face with his hands. And while he knelt there, he remembered that to-night was Christmas Eve.

The next morning Major Biddecomb rode over, and found the colonel by the gate.

"What luck, colonel?" he queried.

"Fine!" cried the colonel, vigorously wringing the major's hand. "I heard the shot about midnight. Didn't go out until this morning. 'Twas a gray, not a red."

"I'm mighty glad you got him," mused the major, stroking Daphne's scrawny neck. "There's no other way to stop a fox. He's an animal that has no conscience."

XXI

THE FAWN

A STATE of affairs had come to pass on the old plantation that, if tolerated, would completely crush Colonel Jocelyn's hopes of abundant crops. It was in May, the vital month for growth in the South—the time when crops are made or lost. The colonel had a fine stand of corn; he had been spared both late frosts and high waters; and but for this new and unheard-of situation, he could now be counting on a good harvest.

Every night for almost a fortnight deer had been coming into the fields and committing what Colonel Jocelyn hotly declared to be "marauding practices." A big buck would lope over the rotting rail fence, strike the end of a long corn row, dew-drenched and succulent, and eat calmly down to the other end, only to start back on the next row. Two or three sleek does followed each buck. The colonel, who came up daily to the plantation from his summer home on the seacoast ten miles away, estimated from the amount of depredation com-

mitted that there must be ten or fifteen culprits. Night after night the crops of cow-peas, corn, and peanuts rapidly diminished.

Once or twice Colonel Jocelyn hunted out the thickets on the edges of his field, and jumped many deer; but he was an old man, and the sun was very hot, and disheartening to strenuous effort, and the one deerhound that the colonel had was decrepit. He was so infirm that often when he struck an excitingly fresh scent he would merely stand in one place and vent his feelings in a futile, emotional bay. Once the colonel actually walked up to two does that had been lying on the margin of the field, dozing in the high, warm broomgrass.

One night he tied the old hound to a stake in the field near the border of the pine thicket, hoping that his presence might frighten the marauders away; but Prince Alston, one of the negro hands on the plantation, told the colonel the next morning that the dog had yelped all night, and that he must have had a bad scare. Sure enough, when his master went to untie him, he found him shivering and sick. Near by, he saw where a great buck had circled the hound, and pawed and stamped the black loam with his sharp hoofs.

Colonel Jocelyn decided to take the law into

his own hands. He had heard that one night hunt, if successful, would so intimidate the deer that they would ever afterward keep a safe distance away from the field where one of their number had fallen. Not another night should pass, resolved the colonel, before he would put a stop to his losses and his anxieties. He would stay on the old place that night.

The full moon was fringing the broken forest line with light when Colonel Jocelyn, with his shotgun in his hand, left the house and walked down toward the cornfield that had suffered most. He did not feel exactly at his ease; for night shooting is always exciting, and especially so to one who is going beyond the law to kill deer.

Passing beneath huge, shadowy oaks and across velvet strips of moonlit lawn, the colonel came at last into the corn, green-bladed, burdened with misty dew, lustrous in the mellow light. Far down on the edge of the black thicket he found a fallen pine, with dry pine trash underfoot and a screen of broomgrass in front. Here he sat down and waited for the deer.

Meanwhile, from distant ferny solitudes, through the deep-gladed pine wood, into the dark depths of the thicket, a shadowy troop

of deer came toward the cornfield. A splendid old giant buck with towering antlers led them. Two slim does followed, and farther back came two pегhorns and four does. On they came with wonderfully little noise for their size. The old buck led his band to the edge of the field, perhaps a hundred yards from where the colonel sat. There the leader stood; his tall horns gleamed gray above the fringing bushes, but his body was lost in the shadows behind. The shot was an easy one for a rifle, but hardly for an old shotgun; besides, the colonel's object was to shoot a deer actually at work in the field, so that there should be no doubt as to the purpose of the deed.

But no creature in the woods of the South is so wary as a buck that carries great antlers. The proud head was lifted high in the breeze; the antlers shook impatiently, and then steadied suddenly. For a second, as the keen nose detected the presence of the crouching colonel, the wise old "bayleaf" paused; then with a mighty plunge, he disappeared into the thicket.

One of the does, startled and misunderstanding, darted into the field, where she crouched with ears thrust forward, eyes dilated, and slim legs set and tingling; but before she could make a jump, the colonel, knowing that he

would get no more chances that night, threw his gun to his shoulder and fired.

He walked over to where the doe lay between two corn rows, with her white sides gleaming in the moonlight, and her lithe limbs, so fleet only a moment ago, now helpless and growing chill. He did not face the rebuke of the doe's great eyes; he went only near enough to see that she was dead. Then with a strangely heavy heart he walked through the dripping corn back to the house.

But real and deep as was his regret over the occurrence, Colonel Jocelyn forgot it almost completely during the next few days. A far more exciting and pleasurable interest had come into his life—an event for which he had waited twenty years. At last the fine tract of yellow pine, a part of the old Malbone estate that joined his land, was to be sold at auction.

Although Jonathan Malbone, the eccentric owner, had never lived on the place, he had always flatly refused to sell it to the colonel, who knew and loved nearly every stick of timber on it. However, after wretched health and more wretched temper, old Malbone died; and the heirs had put the property up for sale. It was to be sold at auction in Cummings village that Friday night; and when, on Friday

morning, Colonel Jocelyn rode through the village on his way toward his plantation, he heard some talk of the bidding.

Herman Peckham, the German storekeeper, came down from his white porch into the road to greet and congratulate the colonel.

"Your chance is coming to-night," said he, pointing with a fat thumb toward the school-house, where the auction was to be held.

"Yes," replied the colonel, reining in his bay mare, "and I wouldn't miss it for a trip to the moon. Who's against me, Herman?"

"Fred Baker's talking about it, and Ben Whitmore; but the man you must watch is young Lou Sands. I have Lou's acquaintance. He comes from Georgetown to bid for the Coast Lumber Company."

"Well, come down and see the fun, Herman," said the colonel.

The journey that morning was short and happy. The pines were fragrant; the green, level woodland was starred with flowers; far off on the edges of the shadowy cypress swamps, where lush savannas lay in tropic luxuriance, flamed strange, sultry flowers; the pleasant sunlight filtered through the pine needles; and the birds sang joyously.

At last, turning a bend in the road, he came

within sight of the gate of the plantation and saw the great white house in the clearing beyond. He shook the reins, and the mare broke into a light canter that soon brought him, flushed and smiling boyishly, to the line fence and the gate, which Prince was even then opening for him.

Prince looked conscious and abashed.

"Have they been in again, Prince?" the colonel asked sharply.

"No, sah," answered Prince slowly, coming forward and laying his huge hand on the mare's mane. "But I find dat fawn," he added, without looking up.

"Fawn!" ejaculated his master. "Did the doe I shot have a fawn?"

"Must be," murmured the negro.

"Oh, what a pity, what a pity!" The colonel shook his gray head sadly. "Is it dead, Prince?"

"No, sah, but it's sho' gwine die."

"Where did you find it? Where is it now?"

Prince told him that as he was following a raccoon track into the thicket behind the corn-field early that morning he had come to a little open, sunny space beneath the pines, where he had found the fawn lying, too faint to struggle. And there certainly it must have been

since Colonel Jocelyn killed its mother; for it is well known that when a doe leaves her fawn and goes away—sometimes for miles—to feed, her little one will not stir until her return. Prince also told his master that he had put the fawn on a rug in the dining-room, and asked in the same breath whether he could be spared that day to go across the river to a great “jubilee picnic.”

The colonel nodded his assent, put sudden spurs to his mare, and galloped across the field to the great house. Under the big live-oak before the wide piazza he dismounted, slipped off the saddle and bridle, and leaving the mare to graze, ran up the broad steps.

The fawn lay where Prince had left it, stretched on a worn rug on the floor, with its great brown, pitiful eyes mutely appealing. It was young, with starry white spots on its glossy golden coat. Its shapely legs seemed no larger than the colonel's fingers; its delicate hoofs were soft and pearly. It tried to move and lick its lips, and its sunken sides heaved with fright and the eagerness for food.

The colonel knelt down by it and stroked its back. He sat on the floor and took its head into his lap. He looked into its wonderful

eyes, and saw in them fear and yearning affection. Yet it was only after the tiny creature had licked his hand with its rough tongue that he realized its crying need.

He brought some milk, and again taking the fawn's head in his lap, fed it with a spoon. In spite of the strangeness of a silver spoon in its mouth, it drank eagerly; but it seemed too weak to respond to the nourishment. It gasped and struggled with each mouthful. It shuddered and nuzzled up to the colonel.

Meanwhile the afternoon sun was stretching the pine shadows across the wide fields, and a yellow shaft of light stole into the hushed room and lay at the colonel's feet. It roused him to a realization of where he was and what he was doing. It was Friday, and four o'clock in the afternoon. Yes, and on Friday at six o'clock the coveted Malbone tract was to be sold to the highest bidder. The fawn had so distracted Colonel Jocelyn's mind that it seemed years since he had heard of the sale; but gradually he came to himself, and his intense desire to purchase the timber returned.

And here indeed was a plight! With every negro on the place gone to the "jubilee picnic," with no way of taking the poor little fawn

home with him, and with the sale for which he had prayed for twenty years taking place within two hours, what was he to do?

He could not count on Prince's return; for among the uncertainties of Southern life is a negro's return from festivities of any nature. The fawn apparently could not live unless nourished every few minutes. The village was almost an hour's ride from the plantation; if he were to reach the sale on time, he must be starting. But there lay the helpless fawn!

The colonel grew angry, and then flushing with shame at his anger, laid a gentle hand on the tremulous little creature. Easing its head softly to the rug, he rose and tiptoed to the doorway. Under the big oak he saw the mare feeding. He would just have time to ride home comfortably, put the mare away, and go to the sale.

He should be there at six o'clock sharp; for with the strange inconsistency of a sleepy village, official events in Cummings were usually held on schedule time. So seldom did anything of importance happen there that those concerned were likely to be in a hectic hurry. Lou Sands was probably there now. Fred Baker would be on the spot when the time came. And if Colonel Jocelyn were not on

hand, the sale would proceed and the land be lost to him.

Turning back into the room, he saw the fawn's great, appealing eyes looking at him. He could not leave the poor little creature to die. The Malbone tract would have to go; but he could not be such a brute as to kill the mother and leave her baby to perish.

So he went back to the fawn; and it was glad to have him come. Once more his hand rested tenderly on its silken flank, and he could feel its heart beat more quietly and its quivering muscles relax. It nestled close to him, and nuzzled against his sleeve.

An hour passed, and the shadows on the plantation fields were very long. It was nearly six o'clock, and the sale would soon begin. It was hard to wait twenty years for a chance and then lose it! If Prince would only come, he might still get to the sale; but Prince was far away. Six o'clock came and went; then, after what seemed an age, seven. The colonel had lost; but the fawn was safe asleep in his arms.

Shortly after eight o'clock, Prince's long, melodious whoop sounded through the hollow pine wood. Laying the fawn in a big arm-chair, the colonel took a hunting horn down from a craggy pair of antlers, stepped to the

door, and blew a mellow note. Prince came running toward the house.

"Saddle the mare, Prince," his master said. "Saddle her quickly!"

The negro, half-frightened by the colonel's manner, caught the mare and brought her up to the steps, ready.

"Prince," exclaimed the colonel, "I have kept that fawn alive, and it's in there now in the big armchair by the fireplace! Wrap it up and take it over to your house. Keep it warm and feed it milk every hour in the night. And if you let it die after all I've done—"

Prince could not hear the threat that came over the colonel's shoulder as he galloped down the darkened avenue. The mare was fresh, and she was homesick for the tang of the salt air. As she cantered briskly along the level road, the straight-stemmed trees flitted by in the dusk. Now she tore over a hollow-sounding bridge, now she swept into the cool darkness of a bay-branch crossing, and now she clattered through a long, shining water slash. The colonel knew that there was the barest chance that he might yet be in time.

When, still urging the lathered mare, he emerged from the woods and came up on the high, hard-shell road, the lights were twinkling

In less than ten minutes Lewis came running back toward the house. Hampden saw him coming and, quickly taking down his rifle from the gun rack in the hall, stepped out to meet him.

"What is it, Lewis?"

The panting and disheveled man, with eyes wide, leaned weakly against the little rose-garden fence.

"A wild dog," he said, "was killin' the sheep. He done kill five before I come. He done kill the young ram and four ewes. He gone now. He run off when he done see me."

"Whose dog was it?"

As Hampden put the question, his searching look discovered in the face of Lewis something that he did not like. The negro's eyes were on the ground. When they were lifted, they did not meet the white man's eyes, but roamed back toward the pasture where the tragedy had occurred.

"I dunno who dog, sah. When I come up, he run off."

But the tone was not convincing, and the averted eyes told their story. Hampden knew that the negro was hiding something, but he decided to push him no further for the moment.

"Where are the sheep?" he asked.

"Two by Dark Pond, sah, and three in the graveyard."

The planter said no more, but started immediately for the pasture. His swift walk took him down a fragrant avenue, arched with vast and somber live-oaks, then along a stretch of sandy road, and then into a winding, thicket-bordered path that brought him within sight of Dark Pond.

On the borders of that spectral woodland pool, ringed with gray cypresses, from the branches of which pendant moss hung like banners of silence, he found the two sheep. Their pitiful bodies were huddled against the groups of cypress knees. The killer's work, the planter saw, had been very savage. Farther on, in a densely thicketed tract where low and humble mounds showed where the plantation negroes of an earlier day were sleeping, Hampden came upon the other three sheep. He also found a fourth one that Lewis had not seen. One of them had been the handsomest young ram in the flock; another was a gentle ewe that his children had petted. On her torn neck was still a shred of the faded blue ribbon that his little daughter had tied there with laughter and delight.

Leaving that melancholy scene, the planter came out into the pasture road. The blank silence oppressed him. It was after midday, and wild life should have been moving round for the evening meal; but nowhere was there sound or movement. The drove of sheep, he knew, would be huddled, terrified, in some corner by the creek, or in some far thicket of the pasture. And the secret killer?

In a community that is sparsely settled it is not hard to pick out a sheep-killing dog. Hampden knew all the dogs in the pinelands near the plantation; and he knew that there was one dog only that could kill sheep as his sheep had been killed.

What he saw at the pasture crossroads confirmed his opinion. In the damp sand were the fresh tracks of a very large dog; and the planter knew from the character of the prints that the maker of them had gone along guiltily. If not, why did the tracks show that the creature had paused to look back and to listen, had broken into a wild run, and had then paused again with tense craftiness? Hampden had been a woodsman too long not to be able to read the meaning of those signs.

"It's that gray brute that belongs to West McConner," he said to himself. "He's a ne-

gro with whom I prefer to have no dealings; no one has yet proved that it was not West who killed those timber cruisers in Wambaw Swamp. Now I know why Lewis didn't recognize the dog: he is more afraid of West than he is of any one else in the world; and all the negroes have the same dread. Moreover, this is the dog that West swears by; it's the same one that caught a buck last summer on the edge of the river."

But, convinced though he was, the planter wanted more evidence. He did not care to approach the half-wild negro of sinister reputation without a clear story—not because he had any fear of West, but because he did not wish to bring such a charge against any man's dog unless he had proof. That he did not have; but as he stood alertly in the road he believed that he could get it.

The sun was aflame in the crests of the somber pines as the planter reentered the lonely region of deep thickets, old fields, and sandy wastes grown to broom-sedge and young pines. With a certain feeling of eeriness he passed along the silent road, which was shadowy in the dusk of pines and oaks. Again he came to Dark Pond and looked out over its cold, gleaming waters. Making a round of the pasture, he

at last returned to the crossroads, beyond which lay the wide pinelands. Here, he thought, he would take a stand and wait. The killer was sure to return; and probably he would come by this familiar route. Whether he would come before night was another matter; but here at least Hampden would wait—Hampden and his rifle.

Over the solitary forest the sun slowly sank. A faint breeze touched the tresses of the pines so that they murmured and waved. Far off in the pinelands the planter heard a slight movement: he saw a deer, coming forth in the late afternoon to roam delicately. Even while he was looking at the graceful creature, another and a far different form caught his sight. It was quite near him in one of the paths through the broom-sedge that led into the road. He saw the gray bulk, the heavy and cruel head, the sharp ears set at an angle of craftiness; it was West McConner's dog coming back to his kill.

With slow precision the planter lifted his rifle. He was a dead shot; and if ever he had wanted to score cleanly, this was the moment. But, alert as he had been, the gray brute had been more alert than he. Hampden found his

rifle sighted against a blank space in the woodland path. A moment later he saw the dog far off in the woods, running wildly—running with that uncanny abandon and speed that is the unfailing sign of such a creature's guilt.

Now that Hampden was certain of the killer's identity his plan of action was clear: he would go straight to West McConner's house and demand the dog.

A short walk brought him to the negro's lonely cabin, which stood in a brown cotton field. To the planter's rap on the door there was no response. He waited a moment and then turned back toward the road. There, to his surprise, he saw West McConner standing, with Buddy, his little boy, beside him.

Hampden spoke to him quietly but firmly. On the negro's face and over his form there came a certain tense alertness, a guarded cunning, that revealed the spirit of the man. West did not look like a dangerous black man; he was no giant, scowling of face and menacing of attitude. On the contrary he was a small mulatto. His face could easily assume an expression of blandness; his voice was mild. But although his stature was below the medium, his muscles had a certain ruggedness that

showed their fitness. His shirt and trousers hung loosely on him; his head and his feet were bare.

What Blake Hampden had to say West McConner received in silence. At last he said in tones of quiet assurance, "That ain't my dog, sah; I think you must be mistaken."

"I know the dog," said the planter, "and he was in my pasture not half an hour ago. He was on his way back to the sheep he had killed, or else to kill others."

"No, sah, that dog was lookin' for Buddy and me. We been down the road, lookin' for my cow, and that dog was followin' and lookin' for we. Ain't that so, Buddy?"

The boy, who was about five years old, stared up with wide eyes. "Yes, sah," he answered.

He had learned when a question from his father demanded an affirmative reply.

"You see, sah," West went on, "my dog didn't kill no sheep. That must be a dog from the settlement down the river."

"Now, West," said the planter in a matter-of-fact tone, "I know your dog. I know what he did to that buck last summer. It takes a certain kind of beast to do that, and to do what was done to my sheep. More than that, West, I know you. I'll give you until to-morrow

morning to bring that dog up. He must be killed."

"I will send the dog away," said the negro sullenly, "but you mustn't kill him."

"No—no sending him away except on the longest journey he's ever taken. It's unlawful to keep a dog like that. If I kill him, I will give you a good dog; but you are to bring him to-morrow morning without fail. You understand, West?"

The negro would not meet the planter's gaze. Nor would he make any answer until Hampden had turned on his heel. Then the planter heard him mutter:

"If you ever kill my dog—"

To that the white man paid no attention. He had laid out a course of action, and he intended to follow it: if West did not bring forth the killer in the morning, it would then be time to try conclusions with the negro.

Into the pasture Hampden returned. He decided that, to avoid further trouble for that day at least, he would round up the sheep and drive them into the stable lot near the house.

But he could not find the frightened sheep. His search took him into almost every part of the great pasture. He crossed and recrossed paths, penetrated thickets and traced the river

banks. It was now dusk. Suddenly, coming out on a twilight path, he was astonished to find himself face to face with Buddy.

The child had always been a favorite with Hampden. His bright ways and his quaint, elfin manliness had made a strong appeal to the planter.

"Why, Buddy, what are you doing here?"

"Pa say I is lookin' for a cow," he answered with the pathetic craft of childhood.

"Ah! Have you seen your dog?"

"No, sah."

"Well, it's time you were starting home, Buddy; but if you see my sheep, call me."

The child turned away up the path. The planter followed him curiously until, coming to an old field where grew scrubby pines and oaks, he lost sight of the strange little figure.

"I suppose," he mused, as he turned into the road leading home, "that West sent that child here to find that brute of a dog. It's a wonder, too; for if there's anything by which West swears, it's that little boy of his."

The planter had gone scarcely a hundred yards when a sound that chilled his blood broke the twilight silence of the misty pasture. It was a dog's wild and rasping bark, desperate with excitement. It was back in the old field



"IN A MOMENT HE SAW A GREAT GRAY FORM CLEAR A BUSH AND LEAP AT THE CHILD"—Page 269

that he had just left. Moreover, he heard the heavy, thudding running of the terrified sheep.

Grasping his rifle by the middle, the planter ran swiftly down the road. When he reached the border of the old field, he paused. Not far off he saw a sheep galloping wildly; then he saw others. The stampede was coming his way. He knew what was behind them. He would get his shot.

Just then, almost in front of him, he heard a small voice call, "O Cap'n! O Cap'n! Here's the sheep!"

It was little Buddy, calling him by the name of affection that the child used.

The planter advanced, with his rifle cocked. He could see the child now. The sheep, in the wildest distraction, were rushing past. Soon the killer must appear.

"You, there!" called a small voice. "What you doin'?"

Hampden knew that the child saw the dog, and that he was trying to stop him. In a moment he saw a great gray form clear a bush and leap at the child. The killer, caught in his bloody guilt, had turned on his human discoverer. It was misty there in the old field, and the planter had had enough excitement to shake his aim; but at the crack of the rifle the

gray form was hurled to earth. With him went the little child.

Hurrying forward, Hampden found the dog dead. The child was unhurt, although his shirt was torn open at the neck. As he was lifting the boy in his arms to carry him home, a form loomed up in the mist; it was West McConner.

"I have killed your dog, West," said Hampden, pointing to the killer lying stretched on the ground.

The negro made no reply; but the planter thought he saw his shoulders heave slightly.

"What have you to say about it, West?" asked Hampden.

"Cap'n! How can I say anything?" cried West in a voice broken by emotion. "I done see the whole business happen. I'se glad."

And West McConner wept.

XXIII

SCIPIO MAKES A SHOT

THE great Carolina ricefield lay steaming under the August sun. Standing on the high dividing bank that stretched across the field, one could look a mile in every direction, and his gaze would meet nothing but the golden grain which in a few weeks would be ready for the sickle. The field had been flooded and the water came within a span of the rich drooping heads of the rice. It had been drawn from the full yellow river which flowed sluggishly past the eastern bank of the field. To the west, standing dark against the pale blue sky, was the great forest of longleaf pines. Between the pines and the river there had been no peace that day. Since the first pink and white colors had come in the east, since the first breath of sea-wind had been borne up with the flood tide from the coast at dawn, a small army of negroes carrying huge muskets had patrolled the ricefield banks, and the almost incessant firing had told of their vigilance. It was the

ricebird season, and they were the bird-minders.

The ricebird, reedbird, bobolink or ortolan is, in keeping with his variety of names, a sad glutton. When his breeding season is past he leaves the river-meadows and the warm marshes along the coast of the Middle-Atlantic States, and, about the middle of August, comes South. The rice is "in the milk," then; that is, it has headed out and has begun to turn down, but the grain is still soft. The birds flock by millions. Over the ricefields at twilight, when they are settling in the river-marsh for the night, the whole sky will be darkly alive with them; they themselves form a moving sky. In rice planting, the minding of birds is a regular, and often a very heavy, expense. An unguarded field would be a total loss. It is quite fortunate, therefore, that these pests are sanctioned on the tables of epicures. Every year thousands are sold in the local markets or shipped North. One may buy either "killed" or "caught" birds, the latter being higher in price because of their almost perfect condition. They are captured in the marshes at night by negroes.

With a burlap bag hanging over his shoul-

der and a light-wood torch in his hand the negro hunter will bog for hours through the foul marsh mud, braving miasma, alligators, snakes of all kinds, and hordes of malarial mosquitoes. With little or no trouble he covers with his huge hand one bird after another that is either too dazed or too fast asleep to escape. The little warm body will feel itself gently lifted; perhaps it will try to snuggle down in the gaunt brown hand,—but not for long; the negro's thumb and forefinger close down on the bird's neck with a sudden snap, and the poor unfortunate's head flies off into the marsh. Then the fluttering body is stuffed down into the dirty bag. And it all takes only a second! When the hunter goes home, he may take perhaps ten, perhaps twenty dozen ricebirds with him. These he will sell for enough to buy himself a quart of the vilest whiskey, all of which he drinks without delay. Then he goes home and beats his wife. But his reputation in the market as a bird-hunter remains unimpaired.

When the flight of ricebirds begins, there will be found in every plantation commissary many kegs of black powder and bags of number 10 shot. This is portioned out to the negro bird-minders. Perhaps out of twenty minders, there

will be only one real hunter. Sometimes these minders are put on platforms, sometimes on the intersection of check-banks, where the corners of four fields are controlled. There are many ways of rousing the birds, perhaps the most effective, after that of killing a goodly number of them, is to fire a flattened buck-shot, that whirs like the wings of a hawk, over them. When the minder happens to be a boy too young to be trusted with a gun, he will get on a platform or on a wide clear space on the bank and bawl a wahwoo lash of immense length, whooping the while to experience an unmistakable dime-novel thrill at the sound of his own manly voice. Also the excitement thus aroused helps him to forget the unspeakable, unescapable heat of the sun. And the longer he works the harder he works, for the birds seem to get more and more tame as the season advances.

When they first arrive after their long flight, they are very thin and ravenously hungry, but a little wary and shy. Their note is lively but prosaic, with a very occasional trill of exquisite song. As their visit lengthens, and as, with every long, long summer's day they gorge themselves with the succulent nourishing rice, not only their appearance but their voices

change. From a slim, trim, bright-eyed bird, the size of a field sparrow, this wandering plunderer is transformed into what Poe would have called "an ungainly fowl,"—dull, corpulent, incautious. From a cheery, airy, "pink-pank" tenor, he descends to a blase, phlegmatic "ponk-ponk" bass. All his charm and spirituality are gone. If shot at any height he will burst open when he strikes a hard ricefield bank. He is loth to fly from any one. He does not even fear a man like Scipio, the bird-minder. Therefore he is lost.

Scipio was, and had always been, a poacher. He was also, when occasion demanded, like one of Sir Roger de Coverley's hounds, a noted liar. But he was a good bird hunter. What if he did set mink-traps and shoot wild ducks and turkeys on posted land all winter? When the bird season came he was indispensable. His steady hand and eye covered a multitude of misdemeanors, as his gaunt and powerful frame carried him unharmed through all winds and weathers. He was a negro beside whose ebony skin all the darkness of "Chaos and eldest Night" would appear pale. He stood six feet. The beauty of his spare and muscular body was finely outlined under his ragged and loose-hanging clothes. It would not have been a

wholesome mental exercise to speculate as to the size of shoe Scipio might wear. No quicksand could have taken him down unless he went head first. But these are idle fancies. It is time to abandon them to see Scipio make a shot.

Early in the morning he had come down to the field and had chosen a far corner near the river as his stand for the day. He had made for a buck-cypress tree on the bank, and here he had put down his little tin bucket of dinner in the tall shading grass and had left his cur-dog to mind it. Then he had loaded his musket. It was a tedious operation. Into the long rusty iron barrel he poured four drams of coarse black powder that he took from a dirty tobacco bag. This he wadded down with a superfluous part of his attire that he detached from his person in a wholly disinterested manner. Then he topped the load with about two ounces of mustard-seed shot. Again the operation for the removal of the unnecessary portions of his raiment was accomplished. Finally, from some obscure pocket in his under-shirt, he took out the precious metal box of percussion caps. With much grave deliberation he selected one, and settling it on the nipple, let the hammer down with great care. All

that had been in the early morning. Over half the day had passed and the same load was in his gun. He was waiting for a shot. Scipio was no fool. Those other negroes might waste their powder and shot bang-banging all day, but he was a hunter. He was waiting for a shot. The negro nearest him on the bank, who gloried in the name of George Washington Alexander Burnside's Green, had been shooting at frequent intervals all day. But Scipio knew that he hardly had birds enough for supper, and his scorn of Wash was great; but it was supreme when his own chance for a shot came.

Standing in the shade of the cypress, he had seen when the birds began to light near him. First one, from a bush on the margin, lit off in the field; then perhaps twenty or thirty, frightened from some coffee grass by the sailing maneuvers of a marsh-harrier hawk, joined the lone adventurer; then a passing flock dropped down and swelled their number; then they seemed to pour in from every direction; one hundred, two hundred, five, a thousand; one, three, five thousand, and a continual stream pouring in. From far-off corners of the field, restless flocks rose and came to join the myriads.

"If Cousin Scipio eber git in dat crowd," muttered Wash Green excitedly, "I sho' sorry fo' dem bud!"

Scipio, marking the gathering with an eye that had made him the hero of all the little pickaninnies on seven plantations, grinned to himself; then, slouching his old greasy cap over his eyes, he bent under the cypress limbs. Into the hot, evil-smelling, almost deadly water of the ricefield, teeming with all kinds of reptilian life, he stepped. The percussion cap on his musket glistened in the sunlight as he stooped cautiously into the rice and began his long stalk of the birds, two hundred yards away. He bent low in the rice, parting it before him with his musket and his left hand. He sank into the mud and water over his knees. The foul stifling air, hot, and alive with tiny green grasshoppers, rose in his face. He must breathe it. He must keep below the level of the rice if he was going to make a shot. Every thirty yards or so he would, with infinite caution, peer over the rice to see if the birds were still feeding and to get his bearings adjusted. Yes, they were still there; and every time he looked he saw many more still lighting.

The negro crept on. Now he stumbled into a quarter drain, just catching himself in time

to keep his powder dry; now he jerked his hand suddenly away from within a few inches of a blunt-tail, deadly cotton-mouthed moccasin. On he crept, always keeping below the level of the rice. He was going to make a shot. A good shot would contribute as much to his right to do nothing as three or four days' hard work. He crept on.

Now he came to a few stragglers on the borders of the host; plump, yellow, bright-eyed birds that he might have caught with his hand. But he did not stop there. He moved forward, almost imperceptibly. Now he heard them feeding; the endless chirring and chattering of their bills against the rough rice grains; the occasional little song; the soft, contented, full-fed note. Now he was well upon them, among them. Before him, in the rice covering not over half an acre, were thousands of birds. The long black barrel of the musket came up slowly, slowly over the rice; then came the negro's head: the musket was leveled steadily.

"Who-o-o-o-o-e-e!" shouted a great voice. There was a thunder of wings, the roar of a musket that belched fire at every seam, and the echoes of whose detonation reverberated far up and down the river; then the lifting of a

volume of smoke from the field, the myriad frightened "pink-panks" from the scattered hurrying birds in the sky, and the solitary figure of the hunter as he made his way slowly toward his game. He first found "the trail," the line of his shot. Then he caught and despatched the wounded and gathered the killed. It took him so long that Wash Green, waiting on the bank, had conflicting thoughts. Perhaps Scipio had not made much of a shot after all, he thought. But the canvas sack at Scipio's side was bulging out; it was full to overflowing.

As he started back toward the cypress tree he saw Wash standing there; so he took his time. As he drew near, Wash, leaning over the coffee grass on the margin, called:

"Hey, Cousin Scipio! How you mek out?"

Scipio stopped and looked up. He shaded his eyes with his hand. Scipio was sometimes deceitful.

"Bro' Wash," he said loudly, in answer, "I dunno w'at is de matter wid de bud. I sho' do po'ly,—po'ly!" he added with much emphasis and deep disgust.

Wash Green accepted Scipio's word and went back to his stand with a generous feeling of sympathy in his heart that he felt he could af-

ford to so mighty a one who had fallen. When Scipio saw him going he grinned with the delight of a good liar. Coming up under the cypress tree, he pulled out three birds and threw them to his dog. Then he sat down between the cypress roots with his legs stretched out in a patch of sunshine to dry, and counted his birds. There were twelve dozen and five. He had made a shot.

Far down the bank Wash Green fired his last load disconsolately at three birds in line on the margin. As he picked them up he felt exceedingly sorry for Scipio. But Scipio was loading up his musket for another shot.

XXIV

A PAIR OF MALLARDS

AFTER several years of disastrous experience as a rice planter on the Santee River, Maj. Blythe Biddecomb, who had returned to his "stale, flat and unprofitable" law practice in Charleston, wrote his friend, Col. Jocelyn, that he was homesick for a pair of rice-fed mallards. Now, whenever any one mentioned game to the colonel, he took it as a challenge to his skill and as a high opportunity for gratifying his generosity. So the day after the major's letter came he started down the river in a little dugout cypress canoe for Murphy's Island at the mouth of the Santee.

Col. Jocelyn took with him his fine old English gun, a few boxes of 4's, a small basket of provisions, and—more for companionship than for help—Three Cents, a little negro, who, although he had a Christian name, had long worn that mercenary title. And his bright ways and his diminutive figure went far toward establishing the fitness of it.



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"IT WAS A TWELVE-MILE PADDLE DOWN FROM THE PLANTATION"—Page 283

Col. Jocelyn and Three Cents were great "chums." When the boy was four years old, he had remarked stolidly to his father, the coachman, "Pa, you didn't currycomb dat horse right." Word of this rebuke came to the master of Mayfield, and he chuckled in great glee, and decided thenceforward to make Three Cents his chief counselor.

For several years this comradeship between the white-haired old gentleman and the pickaninny had continued; in fact, the colonel became quite dependent upon Three Cents, and the boy looked to his patron for everything.

So it happened that they set out together in the canoe, and headed for the mallard paradise—there where the great river lost itself in the greater sea, and where, by day and by night, clouds of wild ducks, wintering on the coast, rolled over the shimmering beaches and the yellow river mouth toward Bird Bank.

It was a twelve-mile paddle down from the plantation; but the tide was ebbing, and both occupants of the canoe were swinging cypress paddles; so the long, slim craft shot swiftly by the shadowy banks, by tall, sighing growths of tawny marsh, by pebbly strands where the tide washed languidly.

Once, standing spectrally transfigured against

the pale afternoon sky, they saw the grim, bleached skeleton of what had once been a proud house that fire had devoured. Then they passed a prosperous place where, in happy contrast to the recent scene, a turpentine still was sweetening the air with soft aromatic fragrance. Then the plantations ceased and there began the long waste stretches of marsh that extended clear down to the mouth of the river.

When they had at last landed on the back beach of Murphy's Island, they repaired to the best of the duck ponds, which was situated a good mile across the island. On their way they were aware of the long lines of ducks that frequently darkened the strip of sky above their reed-grown pathway.

Coming at last cautiously to the edge of the pond, where the colonel expected to hear a great clamor of feeding ducks, they were met by a telltale silence. Then, far across the stretch of water, they saw a bald eagle poised on a dead tree; there would be no duck shooting where the monarch ruled.

"Look here, Three Cents, that old rascal has every mallard within a mile flying for his life!" the colonel exclaimed. And to himself he muttered, "Blythe's dinner won't fly here this evening!"

"Maybe, sah, we might find Cedar Island mo' bettah, sah," the little negro ventured.

Col. Jocelyn did not answer; but from the hopeful look that stole into his face you might have guessed that Three Cents had solved the problem. He looked quizzically at the sky, with its few ragged clouds scudding eastward. He had fully made up his mind; but on matters of hunting the colonel always thought it wise not to accept another's judgment too hastily. Hesitation implied doubt, doubt implied thought and knowledge, and the old gentleman was not above the gentle vanity of wishing to be regarded as learned. "Well," he said at last, "there isn't any place to sleep on Cedar Island, and here we could spend the night in the old clubhouse; but, at that, I guess Cedar Island is our only chance."

"Yes, sah," echoed Three Cents, as if the idea were his master's, "dat's de only chance."

Retracing their steps, they soon came to the canoe, which they launched and headed straight across the river for Cedar Island—a long, low sea island, with heavy delta marshes behind and with a wooded point that faced the ocean. It was a famous place for ducks, but because of its remote situation sportsmen rarely visited it.

As the line of cedars on Murphy's Island sank into the sea, Col. Jocelyn and Three Cents gained fair headway toward their goal; but behind them the ashen clouds in the west were hiding the low sun. Moreover, the paddle across the river was a long one and difficult in the cross sea that was running. The colonel was on the middle seat; his henchman swung his paddle manfully from the stern. The going was not very rough, but with every stroke they felt the lightness of their craft and the majestic power of the sea that paced beneath them.

When they were halfway across, the colonel knew that he had made a mistake in trying to reach Cedar Island that night; Three Cents had known the same thing some time before, but he had not expressed his doubts. There seemed to be no immediate danger; but it would be dark before they got there, and the west wind over the salt water was growing very cold.

With those thoughts in his mind, the colonel glanced over his shoulder with a smile intended to cheer Three Cents; but the bullet head of the negro was buried between his shoulders, and his paddle was flashing doggedly from the murky water to the chill air and back again.

"He's all right," the colonel assured his conscience, which was accusing him of bringing a child out into danger.

The sun had now set and the sweep of the ebb grew slower. Tint by tint the colors faded from the sky, and the counterglow in the east died swiftly. Over the river the incoming ducks began to fly. The dull roar of the surf on the outer beaches sounded insistently. The shore lines faded, vanished—and it was night.

"Boss," asked Three Cents, through lips that were stiff with the briny cold, "is we headed right? I b'lieve, sah," he added respectfully, "we is too far down de ribber."

Had the colonel shared that opinion there would have been less cause for apprehension; but the old gentleman thought they were too far upstream. That meant that they did not know where they were. Above them they could hear the whistling music of wild ducks' wings. Vaguely, to the south and east, they heard the booming of the surf. Darkness was before them and behind them; and darkness covered them.

The colonel, old hunter that he was, began to feel uneasy—chiefly on account of the presence of Three Cents. An hour before it had

seemed simple to reach either island; but now the blessed sight and touch of dry land seemed indeed remote possibilities.

There was no moon. There were no stars. The canoe seemed to have changed its course; and the high, smooth waves that she was now riding moved with the strength and dignity that they gather only in the ocean. The cold salt spray began to break over the gunwales, and it froze as it fell. The two paddles were already coated with it. The wind was slowly rising, and with it came that bitter, bitter sea cold that cuts into the marrow. For the first time in his life Col. Jocelyn felt powerless to fight the forces that appeared to be leagued against him. His hands were almost as stiff from cold as the paddle. His legs and feet were losing their feeling.

Suddenly, with a jerk of decision, he laid his paddle along the thwarts in front of him and, steadying himself on the gunwales, turned himself in the boat so that he faced Three Cents. Dimly he could make out the pitiful little form. The colonel's strong arms reached out, took the negro child by the shoulders and lifted him down into the bottom of the boat. He had to wrench the paddle from the boy's hands; it was frozen to the palms.

"Oh, please, boss," the little fellow chattered, "don't lemme freeze! I 'speck I is a goner dis time; but I ain't sorry, sah, dat I come with you." Then Three Cents nestled up between the colonel's knees.

Colder grew the wind, and the waves broke heavily against the boat. Three Cents moaned and trembled. There was nothing to cover him with. Col. Jocelyn lifted one of the little negro's hands and slipped it up his own sleeve. "Can't let the child die!" he muttered.

With that he fumbled with the buttons on his coat, loosed it, and, quivering in the piercing cold, slipped it off and laid it over his little comrade.

Under his coat Col. Jocelyn wore a low-necked jersey. Through that the stark wet wind cut like a saber. He tried to grip his paddle in his numb hands; if he could only get started, he thought, he might be able to warm up. But his hands, coated with ice, refused to respond to his will; so blindly he tried to steer the canoe, and tried to keep her before the wind so that the waves would not swamp her.

Three Cents had dropped off to sleep, but he was still moaning and shaking; and once he shook with a violent chill. The colonel tried to fix the coat tighter about the boy, but he

could not manage it very well. Then he tried to cover the little negro's feet with the loose straw in the bottom of the boat, but the child woke up, crying. Clinging to the colonel's knees, he begged him to make a fire in the boat!

For answer the colonel unbuttoned his jersey, slipped it off, and wrapped it closely about the little black boy whom he was literally giving his life to save.

The child felt instant and grateful relief—the man, acute agony. The fiend of cold seemed to lay icy hands on his very heart. The wind felt scorching, and he thought himself intolerably burned; but he slowly realized that he must be freezing to death. There in the darkness, there in the treacherous inlet, he would meet his end! Antietam or Gettysburg, he said, would have been better than this.

Then a monster, blacker than the night, rose out of the water before them; it rushed down upon them; and the bow of the canoe ran high on the shore—of Murphy's Island!

Somehow, he forgets how, the colonel and Three Cents crawled to the old clubhouse, where they built a roaring fire. And before its huge comfort and cheer they ate the provisions from the basket, and slept.

On the way home the next morning the colonel shot two mallards, and he sent them, with his regards, to Maj. Blythe Biddecomb.

Two days later Maj. Biddecomb was entertaining at dinner.

"Mallards?" he replied to a question concerning their number on the Santee. "There are millions of them there, sir. Now, my dear personal friend, Col. Henry Jocelyn, sent me this pair; and I'll warrant you, sir, that he wasn't on the river long enough to make a shadow. In fact, for a man so robust as I am, mallard shooting is just a little tame; but Henry, dear fellow, could never stand the cold and exposure as I can, God bless him!"

XXV

GHOST POINT

ALTHOUGH Daniel Bonneau had that had once been an "open-sesame" proud Huguenot ancestry and a name to the court of France, he himself did not pretend to high and worldly things. He wished to be known and remembered simply as a naturalist, and as one who had added to the knowledge of science. He attributed his investigating turn of mind to his famous great-great-grandfather, Admiral Achille Bonneau of the French navy, who had been an authority on navigation and on the denizens of the deep.

The Carolina coast, where for generations his people had made their home, was rich in a variety of forms of wild life, and Daniel lived continually in what was a paradise for him. His fine old plantation was one of the most picturesque—and ill-kept—places along the seaboard. It was sheltered on three sides by the whispering darkness of the great long-leaf pines; while toward the east the view

opened on Bull's Bay, a wide sheet of marsh-bounded water. Beyond the bay were glistening sea-islands and the mystic sea-horizon. Bonneau's nearest neighbor was five miles through the woods, and Charleston, the nearest town, was fifteen miles off.

The naturalist was alone in the world, for he had never married, and his few distant relatives lived far away. Yet he was surrounded by companions. The woods on all sides were vocal with birds; the marshes harbored still others. Deer sometimes grazed down to the paling-fence of his back garden, and squirrels darted here and there in the great trees that surrounded the house. Occasionally an old white-nosed otter would swim up the creek that flowed past the gray oaks in front, and Bonneau would study him from behind the shelter of a climbing rose.

Birds flock to a friend, and Bonneau's gardens were inhabited by colonies of songsters. About the vine-covered, wood-embowered house they sang all day, and made the twilight more tender and the dawn more triumphant. In the jasmine and honeysuckle vines on the porch mocking-birds and brown thrushes had built; in a hollow in one of the cedar supports of the

piazza a black-capped titmouse had found a home. Over the hedges of box, in a great elm, orioles had hung their swinging cradles.

If Bonneau wearied of the study of birds, there was always the bay to consider; for the bay, ten miles across each way, serried by white shell banks, haunted of sharks, shadowed by the wings of innumerable shore-birds and sea-birds, was a field for a naturalist to spend his life in. And Bonneau had spent many of his days there, rowing out through Harbor Creek, past Eagle Hummock and Ghost Point, and as far as the margin of the deadly inlet rip, sweeping like a green serpent round the edge of Bull's Island.

One morning Bonneau, hoping to stalk a pelican on the bay, left his comfortable porch, drew his oars out from their shelter beneath the steps, and strode down to his little fishing-boat moored to the decrepit wharf. As he glided swiftly down the narrow salt creek, his eyes were eagerly searching water and shore. Before he had gone far he had seen several brown minks scuttling away from the sedgy margins, a few rare and beautiful Spanish curlews, many shore-birds, and one splendid old bald eagle, fiercely harrying his wide domain.

Before long the bottom of the boat was lit-

tered with curious shells, with nests of black-birds and marsh sparrows, and with odd pieces of driftwood that he had caught in the cloudy eddies. At last, urged by the long oars, the little boat shot out into Bull's Bay, where instantly the wind freshened and the world widened. Daniel dipped his oars and turned his head to scan the bay.

A little beyond him lay Ghost Point, a stark shell bank, just showing above the low ebb. Farther on, the White Banks glistened in the sun; and farther yet, on the verge of the sea, wild white horses, sun-crowned, snow-plumed, raced along the outer reefs. On each side of the tawny inlet were sea-islands. One was barren and bare, supporting only a sparse growth of harsh sea-grass; the other, wider and longer, was heavily wooded with red cedar and pine.

Bonneau turned once more and looked toward his home among the friendly trees; then toward Eagle Hummock, a low, sandy, cedar-grown hill rising from the intervening marsh. He thought he would visit the hummock that day for curlew eggs, but that would be on his way home. So he buckled to the oars, and the bateau continued to pound from crest to crest of the lazily rolling waves.

Soon he came abreast of Ghost Point, the

strange shell formation that was visible only at low water. There was a tradition that all those who had lost their lives in the waters of the bay came to shore on Ghost Point, where on moonless nights they lamented their fate; hence the name of their rendezvous. The sinister appearance of the place bore out the tradition. Now, as the gray shape came into Bonneau's vision, he rested on his oars, gazing at it intently. Then he gave a sharp exclamation, whirled the boat, and rowed rapidly toward the bank.

What he had seen interested him more than even an ivory-bill pelican would have done. It was a peculiar pile of white shells, much whiter than those of the bank itself. Bonneau's knowledge of the coast told him at once that the inevitable hole behind the snowy pyramid must be the home of a stone-crab. "Menippe mercenaria!" he muttered proudly to himself, as he bent over the oars.

A stone-crab is one of the several hermits of the crustacean family. His body is shaped in general like that of other members of his species, but is proportionally much smaller and much higher. His claws, his distinguishing feature, are shaped like a lobster's, and grow

to great size, having, too, a powerful vise-like grip. His legs are strong and spidery, so that he can hold himself firmly in position while seizing his prey. His hole is invariably in a shell bank, below the high-water mark.

When the tide recedes, the crab retires into his cavern, which is just the size of his body and two or three feet deep. There he ruminates and digests his dinner until the flowing of flood-tide water into his doorway tells him that it is time to forage again. He crawls to the mouth of his hole; and there, anchored in the swaying tide by his tough black legs, he thrusts with his powerful claws, snapping in small fish.

When the shadow of a creature that he fears floats by, he crouches in his hole, his claws folded against his breast, or else drawn in close and defiantly open. Few fishermen have the courage or the patience to try to dislodge a stone-crab; but such an opportunity was what Bonneau had for a long time been wishing.

His rocking boat grated on the shells and came to a stand. Unshipping his oars, he laid them along the thwarts, rose, tossed the claw anchor high on Ghost Point, and stepped out on the reef of sinister name. Before the stone-crab's hole, on hands and knees, Bonneau in-

vestigated the situation. As the opening was about nine inches across, the crab would be a very large one.

Tepid, cloudy water stood in the hole a few inches below the top. Occasionally a small white bubble rose slowly to the murky surface. Evidently the crab was at home.

Bonneau scraped about the mouth of the den with an old conch-shell, but the bank had been pounded solid by the ceaseless beating of the waves. He went back to his boat and got an oar, with which he tried to pry away the shells compacted together and guarding the creature's fortress. But it was like trying to dig a post-hole with a wheat stalk. The oar grated and bent; the tough ash fibers cracked and strained; but save a few splinters of shell, no damage was done. Bonneau laid the oar down and began to roll up his sleeve. As he did so he watched the movement of the tide, noting the slack in its flow. The turn was not far off.

With his left arm supporting his weight, Bonneau dipped his other into the cloudy hole. He wanted the crab, and he was going to have him; and this was the only way to get him out. He must reach his hand down, take the creature unawares, grip him so that he could not

open his claws, and jerk him out. But since the holes are deep, the stone-crabs strong, and always crouching with their claws outward, the plan is a precarious one. Bonneau found the water warm, and his cautious fingers followed the passage downward and backward under the crest of the bank.

Twice he jerked his hand back as it touched a pointed shell, but returned it swiftly, half-angry with himself. He knew that he could tell the crab when he felt it—the unmistakable smooth roundness of the formidable claws, the sharp spikes on their ridges, and the sinewed sutures of the joints. He would have to grasp his prey between his thumb and forefinger, and drag him forth while his claws were pressed together. Once out of the hole the crab would attempt no escape; he would offer sullen resistance.

Farther and farther into the invisible cavern Bonneau's bare arm crept. The pale water lapped sluggishly against his flesh. The hole was so deep that he was obliged to rest his weight on his elbow. Finally he lay flat on the reef, his arm in the stone-crab's den up to the very shoulder. His feet were in the wa-

ter,—for the flood had set in,—and he glanced about to see how high it had risen. As his eyes turned and his hand shifted slightly, he felt a sharp shock of pain, and a grim and terrible clutch gripped him about the thumb and through the palm of his hand. The great stone-crab had him fast.

Bonneau jerked back, but the stone-crab gave only slightly, just enough to permit the man to lacerate his arm against the sharp shells that lined the hole. The creature had him in such a way that he could not use his thumb in an attempt to crush its body; and his arm was so deep in the passage that he could get no purchase with it. He tried to squeeze his other hand into the aperture, but it was too narrow. He peered over the reef, and saw clean foam, fresh from the sea, rolling in on the crests of the flood.

A broad-winged sea-gull circled over him with a discordant cry. Bonneau gritted his teeth and set his weight against the creature in the hole. The socket of his shoulder crunched and the arm stretched, but the dread grip at the bottom of the murky water was in no way loosened. Bonneau was a brave man, but he groaned to think of what he had come to.

While he thus lay prone on the reef, the water crept over his feet and stole up his legs. The frayed edges of long waves, sea waves, broken in part by the inlet and in part by the White Banks, washed over his lower body. Far beyond the bank a great gray pelican flapped above the water with lazy, powerful strokes; and just beyond the bank Bonneau saw, with a sickening gulp in his throat, the tall, keen fin of a tiger-shark ripping the water as it circled.

His boat was lifted from the sand, swung round to the lee of the bank, and there tossed impatiently against her hawser. The man turned his body in the water and lay at another angle; but it only added the pain of a twisted arm to that already torturing him. The crab had broken the flesh of his hand, and his heavy claws were dully tearing it. The salt scorched the wound cruelly, and the deep pain was maddening.

Little was now to be seen of Ghost Point. A green, rolling wave, with a lordly crest that smoked misty spume against the low sky, broke its back over the shell bank, and took a gasping revenge in drenching Bonneau. Strange little elfin creatures, perhaps the spawn of barnacles, crawled about his feet and ankles.

His boat looked far away, so greatly had the water-width between them been increased.

The tide was now up under his chest, and once a low, sliding wave rippled like a velvet paw under his throat and chin. Madly he wrenched at his suffering hand; but the agony made him sick, and he sank back limply into the water whence he had partly risen. Another wave raced up on the reef and snatched the oar that lay beside him, retreating like a threatening beast, curling a dark lip to show a white fang.

Bonneau had once been employed by the coast survey to assist in sounding Bull's Bay, and he knew the depth of the water between every reef, and on every reef at high tide. Up to this time he had taken quiet pride in his knowledge; but now he wished that he knew nothing of the bay. For an insistent and burning memory showed him this, written in his black, official note-book at home:

"Ghost Point, three hundred yards east-south-east from mouth of Harbor Creek. On direct line between blazed cedar on Eagle Hummock and Bull's Island lighthouse. Bad reef for boat of any draft. Shows at low water. Depth of water on Ghost Point at high tide, four to six feet."

Perhaps the facts of his death would never be known, for there were creatures waiting for him to die. He saw the big tiger-shark sailing off at some distance. A huge hammer-head, with one bulging eye out of the water, slid craftily by the bank. Several dog-sharks were ripping the water near the boat, and the fin of a second tiger rose and then sank near the reef. Out of the glassy crest of a foamless wave the bald and benign head of a big sea-turtle appeared, surveying the scene amiably.

A bursting white wave washed over Ghost Point and blinded Bonneau. And once again, for a last time, while his whole body throbbed with the fierce agony, he labored against the little animal that was drowning him. But he labored in vain. The tough prehensile legs of the creature were locked and braced in the socket of the hole, and no leverage that the man could bring to bear would move him. Bonneau's exhausted body was now floating or rather rolling here and there in the eager, hurrying tide.

The tide lipped the stone-crab's hole and flowed warmly under Bonneau's armpit. He

felt a slight shift of the grip on his hand, a cautious relaxation. A wild joy thrilled the man's heart and tingled through his whole frame. He knew what was happening in the dreadful hole. He eased himself up with his left arm and drew his right arm out, ever so softly and gently. The crab still had him, but the crab was moving. Slowly, slowly they came, the lacerated hand and the creature that had done the work.

Finally Bonneau got his elbow out, and he could stand the suspense no longer. With a cry of triumph, much resembling a shriek of despair, he jerked his arm clear of the hole and sprang to his feet. From his bleeding right hand there hung a huge stone-crab, sullen and menacing.

Bonneau leaned over until the creature rested on the water-swept shell; then he crushed him savagely—too savagely for a naturalist—with his heel. But the claws, deeply embedded, had to be pried open.

The flood, the power that had lured the crab from his den, was now flowing freely over Ghost Point, and the green water eddied about the last visible fluke of the little anchor. Bonneau pulled the boat toward him and clambered in, sick and dazed. And as he cleared

the water, the tall fin of a great tiger-shark shot high out of the waves, as the gray harrier lunged fiercely along the edge of the bank.

XXVI

THE SILENT CHAMPION

THE great diamond-back rattlesnake lay under the green shade of the dense turkeyberry bushes that fringed the edge of the vast and lonely swamp. The July air was as clear as a perfect white jewel, with faint hints and mists of opaline lights along the horizon. A light wind, blowing inland from the near-by sea, mingled deliciously the spicy odors of the far salt marshes and cedar groves with the hushed and aromatic fragrance of the pines.

On three sides the mighty pines arose; and to the westward, as if marginal to lands of mystery and wonder, loomed shadowy cypresses in the solemn sorrow of perpetual mourning. The growth of the underbrush in the woods was not high, but it afforded thick cover. Here and there a sultry red orchis, dreamy and Oriental, or a cool blue larkspur lighted the prevailing green of the background. There were huckleberries, too, hanging in indolent dim clusters; gall-berries, twinkling in their

dark, glossy foliage like jet beads; and prickly-pears, with their heavy, thorny leaves, their tawdry, flaming blossoms, and their uninviting green fruit. Shady and cool it was under these bushes, and a pleasant retreat from the afternoon sun.

The huge rattlesnake, however, was not at his ease. He had the day before shed his skin, and had foolishly crawled nearly half a mile in his new coat, following the elusive trail of a family of swamp-rabbits. Now he was sore, irritable and wakeful. He lay in a restless flat coil, his broad, malignant head resting on a gray tuft of sphagnum moss, his tail, with its triumph of sixteen rattles, moving nervously over a little space of white sand.

His gorgeous coat, black, brown and of a tawny gold, with all the colors new and bright, was undoubtedly exquisite; but its beauty was awful. Its charm was like the false lure of evil, sinister and deadly. Six feet he measured from tip to tip—a diamond-back of the swamps, probably the most venomous and the most morose of all rattlesnakes. His baleful yellow eyes glittered in their shallow sockets. His broad, angular head was malignant in de-

sign as well as in appearance. Over the curved and cruel mouth the lips were drawn and pale—sarcastic they seemed, terrible they were. His great body arched away from his head until it reached the size of a strong man's arm; there it tapered rather gradually to his blunt tail, tipped by the dry-whispering rattles.

Among the various forest tones, there was one vibrating sound that stirred the sullen heart of the snake to dangerous malice. It was the thud of a solitary woodsman's ax, ringing into the deep heart of a tall yellow pine that stood about thirty yards from where the snake lay.

The man had been at work on the tree since noon, and his relentless strokes were fast telling on the stately monarch. He was deep on the back cut now, and was glancing about to see where he would turn to clear himself from the fall. There was an old sheep-path through the turkeyberries, running at right angles to the purposed line of the cast, that looked to him best.

Presently, as he looked up, he saw the proud crest shiver and sway. Then he heard a crack at the bottom, and grasping his ax by the hilt he sprang lightly away down the blind path,

looking back over his shoulder. The pine shuddered through all its splendid height, sank majestic from its lofty place in the blue heavens, whirled with sickening speed, spun on its axis, and plunged straight downward on the bewildered man! He had but time to turn with a smothered cry when a far-reaching limb struck him, and he was driven heavily to the earth.

The end of the limb had been dashed deep into the ground just a few feet beyond where the man lay; its heavy length was pinning him to the ground. His right arm was crushed close in to his body. His weight must have fallen on his left elbow, for the arm was broken near the shoulder. He fainted when he tried to move it.

When he opened his eyes a minute later, somewhat recovered from the first shock, he grew sick through all his strong frame, and only his indomitable will kept him from fainting away again. For there in his lordly spiral coil, with his head and his singing rattles on their fatal level, the great diamond-back rattle-snake was poised, a scant two feet away, ready to strike.

At the first downward rush of the tree, the snake had turned in flight, to be halted

by the violent fall of the man, that seemed a threat of attack.

The dreadful beauty of the snake, the helplessness of his own position, together with the fleeting memory of his happy safety but a few moments before—were these not enough to draw the blood from his heart and send it in a dull, hot flood into his head in one wave of shuddering pain and weak anguish?

He knew rattlesnakes well enough to realize his situation. If he stirred, if he closed his eyes, perhaps, the monstrous reptile would strike him—full in the face, most likely. The broken arm that he had moved was in a position that caused him excruciating pain. He shifted it ever so softly, and the fierce, wide head shot down swiftly; but it withdrew without striking, its eyes glittering and its evil hiss torturing the unfortunate man with menace and with delayed cruelty.

He was so young a man to die! He had but the year before cleared for himself a little farm in the vast, solitary pineland, and there was happy with his wife and their little child. He was their whole world, as they were his. He prayed with a feverish mind, all the while gazing fixedly at his murderer, which seemed to gloat over his helplessness.

Supreme upon the topmost bough of a nearby live-oak, a joyous mocking-bird sang a few cool notes to the crystal air; then, hearing the rattlesnake, he paused tremulously, turned his head on one side, made certain of his fear, and flew wildly away. A shy wood-thrush let his inquisitiveness lead him near the buzzing rattles; then he, too, darted away through the brush.

So the man and the reptile were left alone. In those fleeting, delirious seconds the victim's mind wandered strangely. He remembered his school-days and a book that his teacher had lent him to read out of class. It was all about forlorn princesses, and the desperate fealties of their champions. How brave and hardy those champions were! How he had longed to be one, longed so far back in those early days! Ah, for a champion to save him now! But there was no sound of a rescuer approaching; there was but the insistent, cruel song of the rattles.

The man had sometimes thought of death, and the thought had never awed him as it did now. For how was he so to forecast the years as to know that remotely, with no fond heart near to cheer him with its faith and to light

him with its love, he was to meet his end, alone, and in nameless agony?

The poor woodsman's eyes filled with tears as he thought of his wife, with their baby in her arms, searching for him. He thought of their finding him, and at this his tears ceased suddenly; for there are imaginings too deep for tears to relieve. They would find him—he shuddered on the brink of the vision.

Now his thoughts, although covering so wide a range, were almost instantaneous. A last imagining haunted him most vividly. His loved ones would come early to look for him. They had been coming down the road to meet him of late, the weather had been so fine and the baby so well; and the most precious moments of his day were when he bore the little fellow homeward on his broad shoulders through the falling twilight. They would come to-day to meet him; not finding him, they would search. What then? The snake might still be near. He marked the fresh coat, and knew that the reptile was more dangerous than usual because of it. If he might only warn them! If they might only know of their peril, and beware!

He tried to think what rescuers had ever

come to him out of silence. Surely there were many. Love, prayers answered, the marvelous secrets from the green, gigantic books of nature—all these had come. But where was now a champion to defend him?

The agony of his tortured mind was plainly visible on his face, and the rattlesnake saw the change. Tenser grew his body. The monstrous head drew back, flattening; the rattles sang shrilly. And the man, his face bleak and gray, praying brokenly for his wife and little child, closed his eyes as if in death.

The rattles whirled wildly for a second; then they ceased abruptly. There was a sound of scaly movement. The man's eyes unclosed, and unclosed on an amazing sight. The great rattlesnake, with an expression of positive terror about the eyes and mouth, had dropped swiftly from his coil. Now he glided furtively by the man, never noticing him. Every motion was a fearful one. No longer was he supreme; cowed he was, and a fugitive.

The man guessed the rattlesnake's pursuer; but because of the height of the bushes he did not see him until he was quite near. With a swift and rocking motion, a king-snake came hot on the rattler's trail. His bright eyes darted this way and that, glittering with the

fierce love of battle. Not a sound he made as he sped onward. Silent and swift and sure, he was as a very answer to prayer itself.

His size was not so great as that of the rattlesnake, but his skin was far more beautiful. Wide bands of pure black and white circled the muscular lithe body, built for strangulation; for that is his form of attack on the rattler, one of his inveterate enemies. To man he is harmless.

The speed of this silent champion was wonderful. His graceful body swayed into curves that shot him forward along the thin paths through the underbrush. Near where the man lay he paused momentarily, glanced curiously at the pinioned form, and darted silently on.

Struggling backward, the woodsman worked himself clear of the binding limb. He had a very strange feeling as he stood up, as if he were dead and risen again; but he knew that he was safe. As his burning eyes swept the near bushes, they caught sight of two flashing bodies wrapped in gorgeous battle, swaying, struggling, twisting, strangling. The great thunderbolt had fallen upon the rattler, and no rattler that ever grew would be a match for him.

The woodsman ventured near and saw the

end of the battle. In a few minutes the beautiful demon with the tawny coat of black and gold lay lifeless in the powerful coils of the king-snake.

So the man came home safely, but for his broken arm; the rattlesnake died in fair fight with the king-snake, and the silent champion had triumphed.

You would think that the woodsman might never want to recall so terrible an experience, but he does. Often he thinks of his peril and of his deliverance, and he trusts wonderfully and more and more in the great silent forces that surround us—love, mercy, and prayer.

XXVII

SHADRACH AND THE FIERY FURNACE

SOMETIMES the telephone line between the cottonseed-oil mill and the superintendent's house would not work; then the great whistle on the mill would blare across the marshy flats, calling raucously for the master. It was not a pleasant summons, especially in the dead of night. There were nervous people living on the edge of town who declared that they had been terrified into believing it the trump of doom. But Charley Piollet, the superintendent, knew that it meant no such fantastic crisis; it was merely a leaky valve in one of the cylinder-heads, or the misadjustment of a linter, or, at worst, it might mean that one of the negro workmen of the night-shift had been injured.

It was two o'clock of a rainy January morning. Dead asleep lay Charleston. Gray mists shut out the harbor, the two great rivers between whose arms the city slept, the brackish marshes and mud-fields north of the town, on which the black bulk of the mill loomed, and

the dark, mighty forests to northward. Mists and rain everywhere, blurring the light, dripping from wires and trees and houses, softly curtaining the windows of the sleepers. It was a night for heavy sleep; but Charley Piolet was awakened by the futile tinkling of the telephone bell. It showed that some one was calling him, but couldn't get the message through. A moment later the muffled, long, husky shout of the great whistle told its story. It was calling for one out of all those who were sleeping.

Piolet slipped quickly out of bed. In five minutes he was dressed. Fifteen minutes after the whistle had blown, his little car drew up before the mist-shrouded mill. The superintendent's tall form bulked huge in the fog. He strode into the office.

"Well, Dave?" he asked quickly.

The night foreman was a negro, small and brown and middle-aged. He personified faithfulness. He and Piolet together had run the oil mill for twelve years; and between them there was a perfect understanding that found its expression in their mutual trust and good will.

"I had some trouble with a man, sir," Dave Mullin replied. "I couldn't exactly handle him; and the other boys—I didn't want them

to get into it. Sorry to call you, Cap'n, but I needed you."

"Who is this fellow? Is he white?"

"No, sir, he's colored. He's never been in these parts before. He must have dropped off an A. C. L. freight."

"What did he try on you, Dave?"

"He said he wanted a job in the mill at the best figure we paid, and he wanted it in a hurry. I told him to go on about his business; but he began to stir up trouble among the boys, asking them what they were getting, and saying that they could get twice as much in Mobile or Pittsburg or at Hog Island."

"Where's this walking delegate now?"

Piollet had slouched off his overcoat and was drawing on his overalls. Then he fitted on his head a tight little rubber cap. It pays to take a few precautions when one is moving about among the whirling belts, roaring linters, and gurgling presses of an oil mill.

"He asked me if I was the boss," Dave went on. "I told him I was just the night foreman. Then he said he'd make the boss give him the job he wanted the minute he came."

"Been drinking?" shot out Piollet, not sure but that Dave had called him without much reason.

"Yes, sir. And, Cap'n," and the little brown man came close, a light in his eyes that showed both affection and apprehension, "I ask you to be careful with that stranger. Take your gun out of the safe, please, Cap'n," Dave pleaded. "This man is a bad actor."

In his heart Dave Mullin had not a doubt but that the man who stood before him could give a good account of himself. Charlie Piollet had the height and the strength and the courage. His huge shoulders, his massive chest, his long and powerful arms, and his broad, peculiarly masculine hands had not come to him by chance. Living a hardy life and toiling for years with machinery had made him what he was. Moreover, the direct approach he made to men and his straight steady way of looking at them were steps toward mastering even the most untractable of those with whom he had to deal. Now, when his foreman, solicitous for his safety, mentioned the pistol, Piollet began to smile deprecatingly.

"Dave, the company made me buy that thing, but I never expect to use it. Come along and see the fun. Where is this friend of yours?"

Still protesting under his breath against Piollet's lack of caution, the foreman led the way

to the engine room. Down a long platform they passed, where great windows opened on the ceaseless activity of the oil mill. Through one of these the superintendent's quick glance saw, under the suffused light of the long room, the gleaming bodies of half-naked negroes toiling about the giant cookers. They had been trained to work with machinery, and they had learned that it would not wait for men to take their time; therefore they moved about with an ease and precision and good-natured timeliness that was worth watching. From chutes that ran across the mill, high up, the cotton seed that had had its thorough grinding, was being shunted into the cookers, passed out on the pans, and straightway borne to the powerful presses that received the huge, damp, warm cakes and squeezed from them the lustrous oil. Piollet noticed that the negroes were not singing as usual. They were on the job, but they were thoughtful. As the two came to the door of the engine room, Dave touched the superintendent's arm.

"Yonder he is, Cap'n, leaning against that window."

Charlie Piollet saw the negro, but he paid no attention to him. What his trained eyes saw was that there were more men in the room

than was necessary. He asked a hulking worker in no uncertain tones what he was doing in the engine room when his place was with the linters. He looked at a couple of gauges on the big engine. He measured with an eye of satisfaction the steady, rhythmic rocking of the crank throws. Though he seemed preoccupied, he was aware that all the negroes in the room had their eyes upon him. Two of the yard workmen had come up on the gangway outside the open windows. Piollet could feel that all of them were expecting something to happen. They were not to be disappointed.

The burly stranger slouched over to the superintendent.

"Is you the boss here?" he asked, with no hint of deference.

Piollet looked him over slowly. The fellow had been drinking. He wore a derby hat on the back of his head. His baggy suit was indigo in color. His shoes were an angry red.

"What do you want?" Piollet asked.

"I wants a job what will pay me good wages."

"What can you do?"

The negro realized that he was being overheard.

"Anything I wants to do," he said boldly.

"We can't make use of your kind here. We handle machinery, and we can't trust it to men who drink. You can get out of the mill through that door yonder."

He pointed with his thumb to one of the exits, turning at the same time to continue the examination of his engine. He opened an oil cup, tapped a feed pump, and stooped down to study the movements of one of the small eccentrics.

It was not that Piollet would deny a man work without good cause; nor was it because the stranger looked forbidding. There was Ben Jackson, the engineer of the cookers. Piollet had taken him straight from the chain gang. The superintendent had promised to give him a chance, and the man had made good, but Ben had not approached him as this man had. Piollet demanded respect from every man under him, a respect so natural that a man would show it even when drunk. He felt that he had no place for this kind of fellow.

Yet the stranger evidently thought so, for he had not moved from his tracks since he had been shown where the door was. He stood in what might be described as a threatening manner over Piollet. Dave Mullin had come near. It was evident that Dave was excited.

Though the men in the room pretended to be doing their work, they watched the scene intently.

It was a curious crowd that Piollet had to handle in that mill. There was hardly a man there to whom he had not shown some personal favor; supplying this one with medicine, showing that one how to start a savings account, and giving another clothes that were sorely needed. They loved Piollet and feared him, but it was in their nature, since they were intensely human, always to be eager to accept any suggestion of respite from toil, or to listen to talk about better wages. Since this was so, they were not wholly out of sympathy with the truculent figure who was refusing Charlie Piollet's invitation to withdraw.

Piollet knew something about elementary psychology. He knew that his men were expecting him to eject the stranger without any assistance from them. They would give it if he called; but it should not be necessary for the man who had ruled them with a sense of his superiority to need them now. Piollet knew what the situation required. As he stood up from examining the engine he let his eye rest with cold surprise on the huge negro.

"Have you come back?" he asked.
"Couldn't you find your way out?"

"I hain't never gone. I wants my rights."
He ended this declaration with an oath.

"I've got a job for you," said Piollet suddenly. "Come with me."

The superintendent led the way through the door to which he had a few moments before pointed. Every eye in the engine room was on the pair. The clanking of the great engine and even the oily hissing of the presses in the next room were more distinct as a hush came over the men. Just outside the door the gangway was widened into a platform on which the cotton seed was dumped from the cars, before being relayed to the seed room. When they had come out on this platform, Charlie Piollet paused.

"Now, stranger," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "you are trespassing on the property of this mill. There are two ways for you to leave this private place. One is along the gangway there, and down the road through the mill gate. The other is off the edge of the platform here. Take your choice, but be quick about it."

"But where's the job? You can't fool with me like this, mister."

"Your job, stranger, is to clear out or to whip me."

"I ain't gwine. You has got to—"

What followed can best be described by saying that it was an impact. There was a moment of furious struggle. There was a thronging of negro workmen toward the the platform. Little Dave Mullin was closest to the two men. Suddenly they broke apart; then like sleight-of-hand work a burly form was lifted high and hurled off into the dripping fog. It fell heavily on the railroad tracks below. There in the rain it lay still.

Charlie Piollet, though his great shoulders were heaving slightly, walked back, unperturbed, into the engine room. He spoke brusquely, yet not without a certain kindness, to those whom he saw away from their posts. He passed over to one of the presses, dipped a finger into the oil bubbling over the grates, and tasted it.

"Cooker's too hot, Fred," he said to the pressman. "That cake was scorched."

Suddenly he was aware of Dave at his elbow.

"Cap'n,"—and the night foreman was apologetic—"dat man ain't done moved yet—dat man you done kill."

"Go down, Dave, and take him out to the gate. If he is really hurt, I want to know. My object was not to injure the fellow, but simply to get rid of him."

Dave Mullin went about the task assigned; and Piollet went over into the room where the huge cookers were steaming fragrantly.

"Too hot, Ben," he said. "Ease her off a bit. Last cakes were a little scorched. How's that sick boy of yours?"

The giant black engineer eased off the steam with the skill of a born mechanic.

"Better, Cap'n, some better. The medicine you bring him done him good. And I's much obliged to you, Cap'n, for the pig you done send me. Yes, sir," he ended impotently, being unskilful in the matter of giving thanks with the lips.

A few minutes later, as Piollet was stripping off his overalls in the smoky mill office, Dave entered.

"Well, Dave, was he able to navigate?"

"Oh, yes, Cap'n," chuckled the little man, "he can cruise 'bout considerable. He's done gone out the gate now. He says he's gwine back Mobile."

The telephone that seemed forever wanting the superintendent, sometimes gave him long

distance. Charlie Piollet had hardly finished his breakfast at home that morning before a call came for him from the mill in Sumter.

"Hello, Piollet," sounded the voice from the sister mill nearly a hundred miles away, "we'd like you to run up this morning. We can't get our new shredders on the linters to work, and we know you have yours adjusted. Can you come? Yes. You can get here at 11.40. How long will it take? I can't tell exactly. We are all balled up on the thing. Yours is the only mill in the district that has these new things working. You'll come, then? Good! I'll meet you."

Noon of that day found Piollet in the Sumter mill. His adjustments there, that set the glittering new type of shredders merrily whirling, chewing with frantic haste and human intelligence the last vestige of lint from the cotton seeds, were no sooner completed than a day letter was handed him. It was from the company's central office in Atlanta.

"Visit all mills in your district," it ran, "for purpose of establishing new linter system. Harland takes charge until your return to Charleston. Be sure to include Florence, Darlington, Columbia, Bennettsville, and Orange-

burg. Stay with each mill until sure shredders working well. Wire us as you get each started right."

It was two weeks before he was back in Charleston.

He reached the city at nine o'clock at night; but before thinking of going to bed he ran out to the mill in his car, interviewed Dave, took a careful and fond look at the huge, pulsating engine, and greeted the boys singing at their work.

"Call me if you need me, Dave," he said on leaving. "The whistle gets me better than the 'phone."

But when the great whistle began to shriek and call, shortly after midnight, the superintendent woke slowly to a realization of the meaning of the clamorous voice.

"Trouble again," he muttered. "I believe Dave's getting nervous."

If, however, he had been dubious of the necessity for the night foreman's call, all doubt was dissipated when he got his car on the road for the mill. Far across the marsh-flats he saw a strange red glow.

"Fire! and at my mill!" he exclaimed, giving his motor full power.

His car flew along the flat road, dashed down the shell driveway of the mill yard, and drew up suddenly. Piollet sprang out.

Running down the gangway, he was met by groups of frightened negroes hurrying in the opposite direction. One of these he caught by the arm.

"Where is it?"

"In the seed house, sir. We'se gwine for water."

Dashing through the engine room Piollet came to the open doors of the vast room known as the "seed house," where all the incoming cotton seed was piled. Within it was a roaring furnace. The pine flooring, the unlinted cotton, the stacks of bags—everything was aflame.

"The sprinklers!" Piollet shouted to Dave Mullin who, standing at the head of a line of negroes, was dashing bucket after bucket of water futilely on the hungry fringes of the flames.

"Something's jammed, sir!" Dave shouted back chokingly through the smoke. "The sprinklers won't work!" He shook his head for emphasis as he was forced to retreat from the terrific heat.

The huge tank above the mill had been designed to serve just such an emergency as this.

It was full of water waiting to be released. The sprinklers were set to extinguish just such a fire as this. Charlie Piollet jerked with shrewd haste at the releasing chain-ends. He knew too much about machinery to try to force his will upon it. The chains would not budge. Something had locked the apparatus. Charlie saw that no bucket line could ever stop such a fire. Already the energy of the men was abating. From the seed-house the flames would roar on to the mill proper, devouring all in its path. The great tanks close by held nearly 60,000 gallons of oil, the product of months of work by the mill. The heat of such a fire might mean disaster to them.

Turning from his hopeless tinkering with the chains, Piollet beckoned to Dave.

"I'm going up," he said to the negro who had reached his side, at the same time pointing to the sprinkler rods that ran along the floor beams over their heads. "Something's jammed. I'm going up to get it loose."

The foreman began to protest, but Piollet was already halfway up. His powerful arms drew him up swiftly and surely. He pulled himself over a beam, his hand gripping the sprinkler rod. The smoke was stifling. Sparks and suffocating waves of heat swiftly

thronged into his face. But he felt his way on. Now he was over the fire itself. Behind him and below him he could see the upturned faces of the terrified workmen. He came to where a set of cogs controlled the rods. He could hardly see them, but he knew all about them. Feverishly his great intelligent hands ran over them. Something had told him that the trouble was here. It was. Piollet's fingers felt a foreign object. It was a crooked twelve-penny nail. Dropping from a rafter, or perhaps tossed up by the engine belt, it had found lodgment in the cogs, blocking the action of the sprinklers.

The man jerked out the nail. Dimly he could see Dave Mullin through the red glare. He motioned violently for the foreman to pull down on the chains. He shouted, motioning again. He reeled, clutched for a beam; but the smoke blinded him. He missed it, his strong hand closing convulsively on air. Swooning he fell into the crimson maw of the fire. After him came the water, sufficient to curb the fire slowly, send puffs of steam hissing toward the roof, to put it out at last; but not sufficient to save Charlie Piollet.

Yet it was Charlie Piollet, the same and not

the same, who, three weeks later, put out a hand from a hospital cot and greeted little Dave Mullin who had tiptoed fearfully down the big white room.

Their talk could be of but one thing: the fire at the mill.

"Tell me all about it, Dave. You see, I don't even know how it started."

In his quaint way, Dave gave the superintendent a full account, ending with a reassuring, "She's running about as usual, about as well as she ever runs when you're away."

Piollet, whose strength had not as yet come back to him, began to feel drowsy.

"By the way, Dave," he asked, "how did you boys get me out of that place? I thought I saw Ben Jackson's face—"

The papers, at the time of the fire, had been full of the story of the rescue of the superintendent from the flames by the daring of one of the negro workmen; but Piollet knew nothing of it.

"We didn't do it, Cap'n, nor Ben neither. It was that Shadrach."

"Who?"

"That new man that Mr. Harland done take on while you was away to Sumter."

"Strange he should risk his life to save me when he didn't even know me," Piollet said drowsily.

"He done know you, Cap'n! He tell me he wouldn't work for no other man in the world but you. Ain't you know him now, Cap'n? He is dat man—dat same man you done kill."

XXVIII

MARGIE HAS A MAN

ERIC PETERSEN, his wife, Margie, and their five small children had taken refuge in the tower of the lighthouse.

"A bad blow, and for sure, Eric," said Margie as, with four of her little ones clinging about her and her baby held in her arms, she looked anxiously through the narrow lighthouse window.

Below, huddled against the storm, was the tiny trim house they had been forced to leave. Margie did not fear much for their own safety in the stanch tower, but it was a question whether their little house could withstand the frightful impact of this terrific gale.

"A bad blow, yes," Eric agreed; "but here we are safe, and I am where I can light the light. The home, too, will be there when the storm is gone," he added reassuringly.

Yet there was trouble in his deep-set gray eyes. He had been through too many storms not to have acquired respect for them.

They were standing on the second floor of

the lighthouse, twenty feet from the ground. By turns the keeper of the light held his children up to the window to see the wild grandeur of the gale. During the few hours that they had been in their strong refuge, the fury of the hurricane had greatly increased.

There was little to see except rain driving madly by. It did not seem to fall; it shot past the window horizontally. Beneath its streaming veil the white house of the keeper gleamed pallidly. It stood now in the water; for the swiftly rising tide had submerged all the island. The myrtles, the only trees on the small island, were blurred and indistinct, though now and then, like drowning creatures, they tossed their dark wild arms despairingly. The vast sea marshes, stretching away behind the island, were shrouded and lost. Only the lighthouse stood firm and impassive; it was an outpost that could escape no storm, and it had been built to stand against them all. Eric Petersen knew what he was saying when he told his wife that they would be safe in the tower.

"Mother, shall we have to swim?" little Margie asked. To swim was as yet one of her unrealized ambitions, and the opportunity to achieve it now appeared to her to be good.

"I hope not," the mother replied and put her hand on the child's head.

At that moment, as if to shatter the hope thus expressed, the lighthouse trembled wildly. Then quickly followed a succession of shocks as if some tremendous ram were driving with insane malice against the structure.

"An earthquake, Eric!" Margie Petersen exclaimed. "There was one here before our time," she added.

The keeper did not answer. He ran over to the window on the seaward side of the tower and peered down through the blinding storm. His gaze was fixed for some moments, and his wife joined him. Presently he drew her to the window and pointed.

"See it, Margie?" he cried. "'Tis no earthquake, but 'tis something to batter down our tower."

"I see a dark shape," the woman answered. "It is floating. It drives against the tower. Oh, Eric, what is it? It looks like the big sperm whale we saw ten years ago in mid-ocean when we came over from Copenhagen."

"You remember the big cypress log I caught drifting—the fine timber that had come down to sea from the river back in the mainland?"

"Yes, and sure; it lay out on the beach

in the sunshine. The children played on it."

"And when they slipped over its butt end, they slipped six feet to the ground. 'Tis a monster of a log. I had it tied with a section of steel cable. The tide has lifted it out of the sand and has swung it round so that its butt end now points landward. The cable is just about long enough to let the log reach us. Whenever the storm gets the monster lined right, it rams us. There it comes now, Margie."

The solid tower shook.

"She was not built to stand that," the man said gravely. "I see a job for me."

"Oh, Eric, what can you do? You will not go out into the storm? Sure, Eric, and the log will break loose and float away."

"I tied it just so a storm like this couldn't steal it away from me," the keeper replied.

"But you—what will you do?"

"I will go out and untie it," he answered quietly.

"You go, Eric?" the woman said slowly, as if in a vision she had divined his fate. "But you will not come back. You will go and leave us."

"Margie, I am the keeper," was Petersen's reply, "just the same in fair weather as in foul.

I've got to save the tower, and I've got to save you and our children, too."

He looked straight into her eyes as he was speaking. They had in life looked too deeply into each other's eyes not to see there light for all guidance.

"You got a duty, Eric. Kiss me, and go."

The keeper took a brief farewell of his wife and little ones.

"You can watch me," he said.

"Eric! Eric!" cried his wife suddenly. "A rope! I tie a rope to you and hold it here."

The keeper, who was taking off his coat and shoes, paused to smile at his wife.

"You and I cleaned the tower last week, Margie," he reminded her. "'All this old rope, Eric, it must be taken to the woodshed.'" He quoted her, laughing and mimicking her tone, and made the children laugh. "Not a foot of rope in the tower," he went on. "Now, I go."

He drew his wife closer to the seaward window.

"I drop down," he explained; "the water's nine feet deep now; high tide and storm, too. I climb along the log. I loose the cable."

"And then?"

"I swim to the tower steps on the lee side."

His voice was full of assurance; but in his eyes, which always spoke the truth, there was a doubt.

"Margie," he said to his little daughter, "somebody is going to swim."

The ready smile for the child died on his bronzed face as the huge ram smote the tower a thunderous blow. From the great air shaft of the tower there came the tinkling sound of breaking glass.

"The light!" exclaimed Margie.

"One mirror, maybe," her husband admitted. "But most likely the big shade. Stand back from the window."

While his wife and children took shelter against the curved wall of the tower, the man threw up the narrow sash. The hurricane rushed in, and he had to fight to make his way against it. He reached the sill, with the wild wind screaming in his face; then, turning cautiously, he let himself down outside the tower. There he hung by his hands. Behind him Margie closed down the sash. He was alone in the storm.

It was an eleven-foot drop into the surging waters below that charged against the tower, broke against it and rushed onward in furious

vehemence. The keeper had not only to drop into that storm of water; he had to fall near enough to the log to catch it, yet in such a position that it would not crush him against the tower wall. Hanging for a moment in the gale, he waited his chance.

"I'll drop to the end of it the second after it strikes!" he muttered.

The wild rain drove fiercely against him; the wind tore at his clothes and sent his shock of auburn hair streaming over his eyes. The corded muscles of his arms bulged under the tension. He waited, watching.

The monstrous bulk of the log swung in the tide. It bumped the lighthouse shaft with little force. But its recoil withdrew it against a huge oncoming wave. The enormous rolling cylinder of water arrested the ram, poised it and drove it with massive strength against the tower. Even above the incessant roar of the hurricane the keeper heard the dull grinding of stone and mortar; but as, a moment later, he clung to the cypress upon which he had dropped, his half-blinded eyes were not prepared for what he saw: a great gaping hole driven clear through the wall of the lighthouse! Through this breach a storm of salt water was

rushing in mad triumph; and as Petersen lay on the tree trunk, he felt the vast bulk withdrawing for another attack.

"Two more like that last one," he said, "and in goes the whole side of the tower. The wall is breached—if I'm too late—"

His face was grim as he turned on the rolling cypress, clinging with hands and feet to its slippery bulk. The coursing waves ran over it, plunged clear across it, sped with fearful haste along its length, lifted it high only to buffet it and sank it as if to drown it. At no time was its back wholly out of water, and its lone rider went under with it. Once Petersen glanced upward at the window above; but he could see nothing except a blur of spume against the glass. Yet Margie, gazing downward, saw him and what he did.

With waves breaking over him, Eric Petersen fought his way along the perilous length of the log. Its vast bulk wallowed, reeled, rolled, turned, sank and rose. The man clinging valiantly to it had two cares: to keep his hold and to advance. If he did not advance, the relentless battering ram would complete its work of destruction; if he lost his hold, he would lose his game, and the game of life as well. Lying almost flat, he pulled himself painfully toward

the place where the cable had been made fast in the log.

At last he came to the end of the steel hawser, pulled through the heavy galvanized ring that was held in place by a huge screw eye such as the lumbermen of the Southern rivers sometimes use. The keeper sat up on the log; grasping the eye of the screw with one hand, he worked with the other at the cable. When he had, a month before, deftly fastened the cable to the great timber he little thought that in such a crisis as this he would be struggling to unloose it.

It was hard for Margie to see him, now that he was at the far end of the log. But she could discern him dimly and fitfully. A sudden great pride in her husband made her lift her children, one by one, to the streaming window. Whether they saw, she could not tell; but she made sure that they heard and understood what she said. To each one, as she pointed out into the storm, she said:

"To save us and to save his tower, your father is gone out there. For a father, you got a man."

The last child had been lifted. Margie's anxious eyes were fixed on the huge storm-shrouded cypress. Suddenly she saw its mon-

strous bulk, which had poised itself for another heavy thrust at the tower, turn slowly away. It was swinging in the tide. It was rolling over and over. The waves at last had their will with it. It was at the mercy of the storm. But the figure of the man was no longer visible. Somewhere in that gray maelstrom of waters he must be struggling. The log passed from sight, hurrying off under the blind smother of the storm.

A minute passed, then another. Margie's heart beat sickly. The children were aware of her terror and clung to her. She knew not how to comfort them. Leaving them in a pathetic group, she went toward the tower stairs. Downward she looked, along the steel shaft. The bottom of the tower was full of water. The storm howled up at her insolently with brutal mockery.

Margie looked back at the children. Then she gazed downward again. Suddenly out of the surging water within the tower a form appeared; a voice called to her. Though her senses reeled, she saw and understood.

"Don't come down!" the voice warned her. "Deep water here. I come to you."

In another minute the keeper of the light was with his family.

"You are safe, Eric, you are safe," was all Margie could say.

"You lost sight of me," he answered. "I know. I had to swim under water to the tower. Not so stormy as on top," he added, trying to smile at his children. "I had to swim, little Margie."

A week later, when people from the mainland had begun to visit the lighthouse island to see the damage wrought by the storm, many of them spoke to Margie Petersen of her husband and of his deed. She, having a great heart but few and simple words, would say, happily smiling, "I got a man."

But there was no need for any words; for the light in her eyes was love.

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